



“...prioritizing tasks is a very complex task for the brain, so we should do it when we are fresh ”

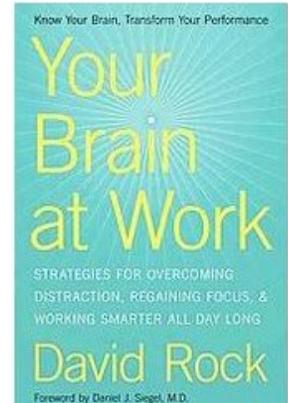
Inside this issue:

Book Review: <i>Your Brain at Work</i> by David Rock	1
Accentuate the Positive	1
Time to Plant!	3
Book Review: <i>What Your Boss Never Told You</i> by Gary Winters	4
Contacting Us	4

Book Review

Your Brain at Work by David Rock

I had the opportunity to hear Jennifer McCusker, Director, Global Talent Development & Retail HR with Oakley, Inc., speak at our Organizational Development Special Interest Group this summer. Jennifer talked about what she’s been learning about how our brain works. She has met David Rock, a current pioneer in understanding the brain. I found her session intriguing and so bought this book based on her recommendation.



All I can say is “Wow!” This book is fascinating! Rock makes understanding how the brain works clear by giving very real examples that I can certainly relate to. His two key characters struggle with decision making, managing emotions, prioritizing, and leading others—both at work and at home— among a few of the examples.

I can’t begin to name all the key points in the book. A couple of things continue to stick with me. One is that prioritizing tasks is a very complex task for the brain, so we should do it when we are fresh – before we run out of mental energy. Rock also tells us that while it’s physically possible to do several mental tasks at once, our accuracy and performance drop off very quickly!

Do yourself a favor – buy this book and read it! I think it will significantly change how you think about how you think!

Accentuate the Positive

Question: *Is there any correlation between how positive, or negative a workplace feels and productivity?*

Collaborations response: We suspect that you ask that for a reason. There is information which certainly indicates that productivity is very much impacted by positive or negative feelings, comments, and feedback in the workplace. (And, by the way, not just in the workplace.)

Positive, Negative, and Neutral ‘moments’

According to the Nobel Prize-winning scientist Daniel Kahneman, each day we experience approximately 20,000 moments. A moment is defined as a few seconds in which our brain records an experience. The quality of our days is determined by how our brains recognize and categorize our moments—either

(Continued on page 2)

Accentuate the Positive

(Continued from page 1)

as positive, negative or just neutral. Rarely do we remember neutral moments.

The memories of our lives are recorded in terms of positive and negative experiences. Now scientists propose that each day our brains—i.e. our thoughts and our emotions—keep track of our positive and negative moments and the resulting score contributes to our overall mood.

Our emotional tone or mood is defined by the number of positive vs negative moments experienced during the course of a day. This is not really news to those people who study emotional intelligence and how the brain works. But it has major implications for how we can improve the quality of our lives.

An example:

Let's say you are getting ready to go to work. You go out to breakfast to find the children have spilled milk and not cleaned up properly. Your husband complains there's no more cereal and wants to know who ate his banana, so you score 3 negatives.

You find another banana, the husband says thanks, you get everything cleaned up, the kids out the door and he gives you a hug. Score 3 positives. (Score is now $-3+3=0$)

Traffic is heavy, you get off the freeway, take a shortcut and get to work in time: score another positive moment.

The receptionist says the boss is gunning for you, and your hair looks great. Score a neutral (one negative and one positive).

The boss catches you on the way to your desk and says you must redo your report because it was inadequate. Score another negative.

You pass by your desk to get your report and a co-worker is upset about something. You listen to her for a few minutes, say a few encouraging words that seem cheer her up. Score a positive.

When you finally get back to your boss' office, he makes a sarcastic remark about you taking too long. He criticizes your work and dismisses you without adequate discussion, score 3 negatives.

Your day continues with a succession of good moments and bad ones. By the time you leave work and arrive home, your score is 10 positive and 15 negative moments, for a total ratio of 2:3.

At the end of the workday, you are tired and full of left over emotions, usually a mix of positive and negative. But when you arrive home, you find that your children have things they need to talk about, need your attention, and need you to drive them to activities. You have no time and no place to unwind and take care of your own emotional basket. And because emotions are contagious, usually trickling down from the leader (guess who's leader at home!)—your kids end up mirroring the mood you are in. Your mood is more negative than positive because of the ratio of your day's experiences.

The Magic Ratio

Over the past decade, scientists have explored *the impact of positive-to-negative interaction ratios in our work and personal life*. And they have found that this ratio can be used to predict—with remarkable accuracy—everything from workplace performance to divorce.

This work began with noted psychologist John Gottman's exploration of positive-to-negative ratios in marriages. Using a 5:1 ratio, which Gottman dubbed "the magic ratio," he and his colleagues predicted whether 700 newlywed couples would stay together or divorce by scoring their positive and negative interactions in one 15-minute conversation between each husband and wife. Ten years later, the follow-up revealed that they had predicted divorce with 94% accuracy.

Apparently there is a similar magic ratio for measuring worker satisfaction. The Gallup Organization has surveyed some 4 million workers on the topics of recognition and praise, and they delivered startling results. Along with the 65% of

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(Continued from page 2)

people who reported receiving no recognition on the job last year, an estimated 22 million workers are presently “actively disengaged,” or extremely negative in their workplace. The number one reason that Americans leave their jobs is that they don’t feel appreciated. There are not enough positive moments to offset the negative ones.

A recent study found that workgroups with positive-to-negative interaction ratios greater than 3:1 are significantly more productive than teams that do not reach this ratio.

The Bucket and the Dipper

In their book *How Full is Your Bucket*, psychologists Donald O. Clifton and Tom Rath propose a metaphor of looking at positive and negative interactions during the day. Imagine we all have a bucket within us that needs to be filled with positive experiences, such as recognition or praise. When we’re negative toward others, we use a dipper to remove from their buckets and diminish their positive outlook. When we treat others in a positive manner, we fill not only their buckets but ours as well.

Here are 5 strategies from these authors for increasing your magic ratio of positive to negative moments in any given day:

- ***Prevent “Bucket Dipping.”*** Increase your own awareness of how often your comments are negative. Work toward a ratio of five positive comments to every one negative comment.
- ***Shine a Light on What Is Right.*** Try focusing on what employees or peers do right rather than where they need improvement, and discover the power of reinforcing good behaviors.
- ***Make Best Friends.*** People with best friends at work have better safety records, receive higher customer satisfaction scores, and increase workplace productivity.
- ***Give Unexpectedly.*** A recent poll showed that the vast majority of people prefer gifts that are unexpected.
- ***Reverse the Golden Rule.*** Instead of “Do unto others as *you would have them do unto you*,” you

should “Do unto others as *they would have you do unto them.*” Individualization is key when filling others’ buckets.

Time to Plant!



It’s Fall, and at my (Susan’s) house in Southern California, that means it’s time to plant sweet pea seeds and to put tulip bulbs in the refrigerator! For many of you, both of these actions probably seem odd. However, to have beautiful sweet peas blooming in February, the seeds must go into the ground in October. And, because our winters are so mild, we need to fool the tulip bulbs so they think it’s winter. After 6-8 weeks in refrigeration, I’ll plant the tulips so they too will bloom in February.

So—focus now will provide for spring. This means planning. Wherever you live, what’s needed is probably a bit different, but I’m sure some type of planning is required for your Spring flowers to bloom.

Organizations are no different. To get future results, some planning needs to happen. What type of planning you need to do and the process you will use will probably vary as much as the way we treat seeds and bulbs.

I work with one of my clients each Fall. The top 30 leaders in the organization come together for 2 days to celebrate the year’s successes and to focus on what’s needed for the coming year. This year will be the fifth year they’ve held this annual planning retreat. They have realized significant goals by engaging these leaders in looking forward.

Another client has another approach all together. This organization puts together an overall strategic plan every 3 years. I guided them through the process of analyzing the organizations strengths and opportunities. Then we created or affirmed the vision, mission, and values before determining the aspirations, goals, objectives and actions.

In both cases, the organizations are planning now for the future. They will have the “flowers” of their work as a result of the investment in planning.

What are you doing to be ready for 2011?

Plant now!

Susan Gerke

is the president of Gerke Consulting & Development and “helps people work better, together.” Susan's focus since 1989 has been in designing, customizing and implementing leadership and teamwork programs meeting the needs of executives, managers, and employees in a wide number of companies and industries.

Application of her skill and knowledge has been in facilitation, consulting, curriculum development, and coaching. Susan has developed and delivered experiential programs in the areas of *group dynamics, team basics, mentoring, and facilitation skills*. She has worked with global teams and has certified facilitators around the world to deliver management, leadership, and team offerings.

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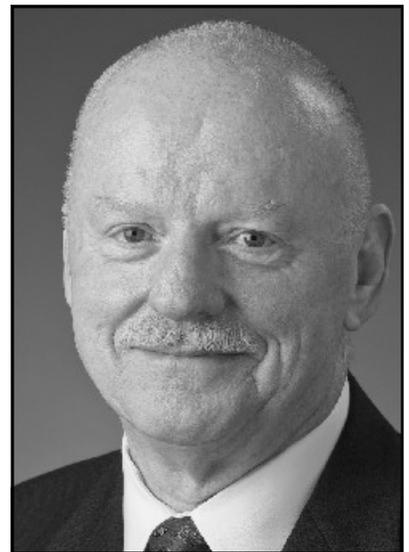
is a sought after motivational speaker, organizational consultant, and coach. As a motivational speaker, Dave relates his experiences as a P.O.W. with intensity and humor, inspiring others to overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties and gain a renewed sense of purpose, satisfaction, and control over their circumstances.

As a consultant and coach he focuses on *helping people work together more effectively*. He is an expert in team building, organizational & leadership development.

A graduate of the United States Naval Academy, Dave is a retired Navy Captain. As a Navy pilot he was shot down and spent 5 & 1/2 years as a POW in North Vietnam.

His book *The Ways We Choose: Lessons For Life From A POW's Experience* is in it's third printing.

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***What Your Boss Never Told You* by Gary Winters**

My good friend and colleague, Gary Winters, has just published his second book, *What Your Boss Never Told You*. I had the opportunity to read it early in the process and have been anxiously awaiting its arrival!

Subtitled “The Quick Start Guide for New Managers” this book is written for new managers as well as for those who have never gotten any management training or mentoring. Gary's approach was to write each chapter as a story he might tell you over a cup of coffee to help you learn a key point.

This is a must read for all new managers or anyone considering becoming a manager. If you are responsible for the new managers in your organization, order several, so that you can hand them out upon an individual's promotion to management!

For more information, check out Gary's website www.garywinters.com or go to www.amazon.com to order the book.

