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Personal Excellence

December 2012

The Magazine of Life Leadership

MENTAL • THINKING

Neuroplasticity

Maximize your capability.



by Christine McKee

TO BE EFFECTIVE, VISIONARY, inspirational, and productive, you need to be aware of *why you do what you do*. You must recognize your habits, attitudes, values, judgments and assumptions you have toward yourself and others. You can make growth-based choices to *expand your potential* in the gap between *what you now do* and the *vision you hold of the most brilliant version of yourself*.

To know who and why you choose to be the person you are now, you need to understand your brain (the most magnificent thing you'll ever own)! You can be in control of it every conscious moment, with the aid of a few tips.

You are at times a creature of habit. You allow your brain to adopt efficient strategies for taking shortcuts when drawing conclusions about events, experiences, interactions, and relationships with different people. For example, you drive, eat, get dressed, shower, answer phone calls, and talk to people in a semi-automatic way. Once you have an interaction or two with an individual, you *sum them up*, make up your mind up about them, and bring your opinion into future interactions.

You create shortcuts in the brain to save mental energy—your brain wants you to create habits, automatic responses, and repetitious behaviours so you can have as much energy available at any moment in time in case you need to run for your life (flight) or fight for your life (fight). Luckily, you rarely have serious threats to your life.

This means that you can think fresh in every moment. You can be more creative and respond to information available to you in the moment. You can make your mind up about something or someone based on what is *real data* in this moment, instead of letting your past views, impressions, decisions, and habits guide your behaviour. How? Through *self-directed neuroplasticity*—making in-the-

moment choices to re-wire the neural pathways in your brain.

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change based on new learning and thinking. All you need to do is *choose what you want to focus on and then pay attention to it repetitively*. As a child, you learned new skills (such as walking, using cutlery, doing puzzles) through repetition. This is no different. You can choose what characteristics, traits, attitudes, communication styles, leadership styles you admire and put your energy into giving them a *pulse*. Breathe life into these things through your *focused attention on being the way you want*, through your intentions, thoughts, feelings, words, and actions.



I suggest that you *be in the moment*, every moment, and make fresh choices that will lead to the best result for you and others you interact with or influence—be it team members, colleagues, peers, or family. If your old habits lead to mediocre results, choose a different thought, emotional

response, behaviour or words that will create great outcomes for all. Do this repetitively and you'll rewire your brain. To create new habits in situations where you're getting poor results, *take three steps*:

1. Pause. When you *pause* to consider what quality outcomes you desire, you gain the power to alter any habitual behaviour, like procrastination or lack of mental focus, and you create better results. When you pause, you create the space to catch yourself in old thought patterns, habits, and beliefs that don't generate successful outcomes. You are then in a position to change the way you lead and conduct your life, moment by moment.

2. Set clear intentions. Setting intentions are simple—state what you want. Suppose you need to have a performance discussion with someone, and you have found this to be challenging in the past. You need to set a clear intention for the outcome you desire. You may intend to *have a respectful conversation*

with the person, where you transparently discuss the performance issues together and reach an agreeable outcome. Notice how the intention is **clear and specific**: respectful conversation, transparently discuss performance issues, and reach an agreeable outcome.

The old perception is that these conversations are challenging. To change the neural pathway of conducting performance conversations to a more positive belief, you need to shake your brain up and make it work for you. To do this, **ask open-ended questions that relate to the intention you have set**. This will ensure your attention is lined up with your intention, maximizing the potential for your success in creating a new performance management habit. Once you ask yourself related questions, your brain will put energy into exploring all of the ways to get answers. Examples include: What is the best possible outcome for all parties in this situation? What might this person need that I have not listened to until now? Do I have all of the relevant facts and data before having the conversation? What else could be going on that I'm not aware of, that has stopped a resolution in the past? Okay, so you have paused, set your intention and asked rich questions to stimulate healthy leadership behaviour, now all that remains is to:

3. Take action. Think thoughts, speak

words, and choose behaviors that lead to getting awesome results. Unlimited possibilities are available to you. This is where you pay attention to your choice through action. When creating new ways of being, *you need to be consistent*. Your brain needs repetition to strengthen the neural pathways of your new, more effective choices. *Pause* and identify an area within your capability that you would like to become more skilled in. Then create one clear *intention*. Identify at least five open-ended questions to get your brain focused on achieving what you want. Decide what *action* you will take to bring your intention to life.

Break free of habits and beliefs that hold you back to create a new and better you.

Realize your goals, using a **four-phase process**: 1) *Awareness*—learning the reasons behind what you think, feel, say, and do; 2) *Focus*—identifying and setting specific intentions for progress; 3) *Maximizing potential*—recognizing opportunity in relationships and life situations; and 4) *Choices*—fine-tuning your skills to make progressive decisions in the future.

Develop the confidence to *empower your own life*, at your pace. **PE**

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ACTION: Take these three steps.

Volume 17 Issue 12

Personal Excellence is published monthly by Executive Excellence Publishing, LLC (dba Leadership Excellence), 1806 North 1120 West, Provo, UT 84604.

Editorial Purpose: Our mission is to promote personal and professional development based on constructive values, sound ethics, and timeless principles.

Basic Annual Rate:
US \$59 one year (12 issues)
US \$119 two years (24 issues)

Corporate Bulk Rates (same address)
US \$30 each per year for 5 to 25
US \$20 each per year for 26 and up
*Ask about logo and custom editions and foreign bulk rates.

Article Reprints:

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Back Issues (print): US \$25
Permission PDF: US \$100

Submissions & Correspondence:

Please send any correspondence, articles, letters to the editor, and requests to reprint, republish, or excerpt articles to Editorial Department, Personal Excellence, 1806 North 1120 West, Provo, UT 84604, or email: Editorial@LeaderExcel.com

Customer Service/Circulation:

For customer service, or information on products and services, call 1-877-250-1983 or email: CustomerService@LeaderExcel.com

Internet Address: www.LeaderExcel.com

Executive Excellence Publishing
Ken Shelton, CEO, Editor-in-Chief
Sean Beck, Circulation Manager

Marketing Offices:
Leadership Excellence
1806 North 1120 West
Provo, UT 84604
1-877-250-1983
1-801-375-4060

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