



Leading With our Entire Brain

-Mark Haeussler, CEO

Science has helped us understand the nature of our layered brain. The most basic section of the brain, connected right above our spinal cord, is the brain stem, sometimes referred to as the “reflex brain”. It helps us pull our hand off the hot stove without “thinking”. The next layer is the limbic system, a complex set of structures that are the emotion centers, storage of memories, motivation, reward, hunger, and related human reactions. *These two inner areas of the brain are capable of acting faster than our thinking brain*, the rational neocortex. This wonderful outer layer of our brain is used for imagination, language, planning, logic, solving problems, and related mental activities.



What does this have to do with leadership? Everything. *We process inputs from the inside-out*, meaning that the reaction and emotional aspects process before, and much faster than, the thinking brain. Emotions are produced ahead of rational thinking. Read that again.

Much of our first impressions are made through our inner limbic system, and not the higher brain functions we want to believe we are accessing. Our limbic system works fast – in a small sliver of a second – meaning people size us up in about a tenth of a second. And we judge others just as fast. Everyone’s brain is producing assessments of other people faster than we “think” about it.

Some of that first impression is something that we cannot control, but we can learn to manage it more effectively. Below are two key strategies to increase how they manage their impressions:

1. **Be the leader you seek to be and be it all the time.** Instead of having a work persona that is different than the person outside of work, or certain personas with different people, align your entire self to the leader you want other to describe. Of course, we continue to adapt to specific people and situations, *and*, we have a consistent and genuine starting point. If I want to be seen as a patient leader at work, then practice being patient everywhere – with our mate, children, fellow churchgoers, abled people, disabled people, fellow travelers, friends, and strangers.
2. **Build a centered presence.** This is not a tips-and-techniques tactic, but a daily *practice*. Get help from a coach with mastery in leadership presence (a field sometimes referred to as *somatics*). As our reptile brain is wired to move quicker than our intellectual brain, we cannot out-think it, but we can help our *body* be less reactive to the impulses of the inner brain *and* help our body communicate back to our brain that we do not need to be as reactionary. Remember, the inner brain communicates faster than our neocortex, so we can help our body communicate back to our brain that we can remain centered. Other resources for this include meditation, walking meditation, tai chi, or the martial arts katas (such as the practice of choreographed Shaolin forms).

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