

Our brain changes behavior, and our behavior changes our brain.

Effective leadership starts with neurons because when we understand that our thoughts, ideas, habits, and behavior impact productivity, we can see how neuroscience can help leaders be more effective and agile.

Having an insight into how our and other peoples' brains work also enables a deeper understanding of employees and customers.

Here are 10 ways that neuroscience can help business leaders:

1. **Become more agile**, able to adapt and make faster decisions – Relying on our habitual ways of thinking and behaving is not helpful when dealing with the new or the different, as many of us have been forced to experience in the last year. We must be able to change, to be nimble and flexible.

Leaders who are more able to adapt to life's ever-changing circumstances and events are likely to be more effective, influential, able to pivot and change, or break habits more easily than others, whilst remaining true to themselves and the business's strengths and values. We change the structure and function of the brain by what we choose to do. Choose wisely.

2. **Recover, remap, and reorganize.** Neuroplasticity refers to the ability to change neural networks in the brain and how it makes new connections and changes existing connections through learning, practice, experiences, and environmental influences.

It is a form of remapping or reorganizing the brain and explains how the brain can recover from damage through reinforcement or repetitive activities.

Neuroplasticity enhances patterns of thinking, making relevant networks stronger and irrelevant ones weaker, bettering our learning and memory.

3. **Communicate better** – Communication that is dense and contradictory is a major risk factor in business.

Communication needs to be transparent, easy to follow, consistent and clearly supported by actions and role models.

If you lose people's attention because of over-detailing or inconsistencies, they will only semi-hear the important messages. The brain doesn't do gaps and so fills in missing information based on experiences, beliefs, and messages from others who may well be ill informed.

4. **Be more self-aware** by recognizing and understanding your own emotions to develop better business relationships, to control unconscious bias and to regulate and manage yourself so that you work with the executive functions of the brain rather than knee-jerk reactions that can get us into trouble.

The prefrontal cortex does a good job in anticipating and predicting consequences thus enabling us to control our impulses and emotional reactions, so taking a moment to focus our attention and think is a wise move.

The knock-on effect is we feel calmer, engaged and driven because we feel in more control of our behavior.

Then by sensing the emotions that drive other people's behavior we employ empathy leading to healthier working relationships.

5. **Have greater emotional intelligence.** There are several areas of the brain which are responsible for human emotion. The prefrontal cortex is also responsible for regulating our emotions and influences our ability to make decisions. The amygdala stores emotional memories and deals with our feelings of fear, anxiety, and our response to danger.

The thalamus receives information from our senses and sends them to the brain, and the hippocampus stores memory and physical sensations of emotion. Strong emotions can cause our rational brain to shut down meaning that rational thinking, creativity, and empathy are all disabled during that period.

Understanding the process of the brain and how our sensory information, emotions and thoughts impact our behavior will also allow us to understand how it may impact others.

6. **Use intuition more effectively** – Our intuition, otherwise known as gut feelings, is formed as a collection of memories, beliefs, experiences, and past behavior, and can be drawn upon for quick but accurate decisions, making it a great response to problem solving.

Intuition is subliminal processing based on implicit knowledge, involving pre-conscious pattern recognition. Therefore, the more experienced we are the more we can rely on our intuition to solve problems quickly. For instance, a study conducted by Cambridge University * found that participants who relied on their intuition when playing a card game did better than those who did not.

7. **Make better decisions.** Understanding neurological patterns and brain circuits enables us to have a greater understanding of why we make specific decisions.

The decision-making process begins when stimuli alert neurons in the hippocampus to initiate a neural response.

The initial information is sent to the prefrontal cortex which determines if any additional information is required to make this decision and if so, retrieves this from the hippocampus. Understanding that decision making is within your control helps to make better decisions and to break poor patterns of behavior that hold you back.

8. **Increase trust and rapport.** The neuroscience of language identifies the neural signals that influence our thoughts over language. Understanding how to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication, actively listening to clients, customers, and colleagues, and evaluating situations quickly and effectively, greatly helps business leaders.

9. **Deal with stress well** to be able to think and see clearly. Knowing the difference between chronic stress and acute stress is useful. When short term stress signals reach the hypothalamus, the Sympathetic-Adrenal-Medullar (SAM) axis sends signals via the sympathetic division of the central nervous system, inhibiting the enteric nervous system (the gut) and stimulating the adrenal medulla which secretes adrenaline. This very much keeps us on our toes.
However, chronic stress is facilitated by the Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis. The hypothalamus and pituitary gland secrete hormones that stimulates the adrenals to secrete cortisol.

So, whilst a little stress in the short term will do no harm and may even improve and optimize our performance, such as if we are about to do a presentation, if

cortisol is secreted in the long term, it can be a danger to our mental and physical outcomes.

10. **Stop multitasking** as it lowers productivity enormously. To multitask we need to divide our attention. Our Prefrontal Cortex chooses what we pay attention to. If we are trying to do more than one thing at a time that takes attention, so we are in fact switching between tasks and constant task switching causes fatigue, exhaustion and agitation and has huge implications for learning and memory as well.

Ironically, we sometimes pat ourselves on the back because we have the illusion that we are being productive, but we are NOT accomplishing as much as we think. So, if you are the type of boss who interrupts your people whilst they are concentrating, think again.

You may be costing your organization a lot of money and wasting valuable time. Allow people to chunk their time to get things done and agree a time to discuss other matters.

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