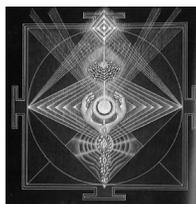


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ORGANIZATIONAL COACHING AND THE NEUROSCIENCES



“There is a growing consensus that the field of coaching studies should be cross-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, or inter-disciplinary—that is, a hyphenated field rather than one that is “owned” by any one existing academic discipline. As coaching theory, research, and practice inform and shape one another, the hope is that an integrated field uniquely identified as coaching will emerge. Over the past two decades, advances in brain research have also stimulated cross-disciplinary integration. Examining this growing trend not only supports coaching in maintaining its cross-disciplinary emphasis, but also puts some of the key elements of coaching, such as the coaching conversation and its capacity to stimulate individual and organizational development, on a firm footing in cognitive neuroscience research.”

—LINDA PAGE, PAGE 22

4 FROM THE DESKS OF THE CO-EDITORS

By Agnes Mura and Marcia Reynolds



...of the Co-Editors

BY AGNES MURA AND MARCIA REYNOLDS

It was a great privilege to be asked to edit this issue on how the latest research in the neurosciences is affecting coaching. As with any science, for many years we accepted certain “principles” about how the brain processed information. Then in the mid-nineties, technology helped to bust this paradigm. What we believed about the brain is in the process of a significant transformation, turning all the helping professions upside down.

At the same time, as this shift began to occur, coaching blasted onto the map. Although executive and organizational coaching has been occurring for years, it started appearing more often in the media and literature, in boardroom conversations and in budget considerations. Organizational coaching made major headway in aiding development efforts. And as would be expected, the number of coaches, coaching schools and approaches to coaching burgeoned as well.

And so we have advances in the science of the mind coinciding and intersecting with the evolving art of coaching. We have seen major advances in adult learning and behavioral change. As we learn more about how the brain works, we are better able to apply this knowledge to our coaching strategies and techniques.

Therefore, we approached leaders in the neurosciences as well as those leading the way in using this body of

FROM THE DESKS...

knowledge in their coaching. We are grateful to those who took not only the time to respond, but to submit the thought-provoking articles we have included in this issue.

First, we are pleased to include an interview with one of the most respected neuroscientists in the world, Dr. Robert Sapolsky. He is a MacArthur “Genius” Fellow, a professor of biology and neurology at Stanford University, and author of many well-known books on the effects of stress, including *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*. Our interview with him covers a number of topics, including what are “optimal stress levels” and how we balance stress and challenge at work. He offers some surprising research on the biggest sources of stress at work and how the cultural conditions in an organization impact and sometimes magnify the effects of stress on employees. He also shares ideas on how we can adjust our mental wiring to counteract the resistance to change.

Next, we are pleased to present a case study from the esteemed neuropsychologist, Dr. John Preston, along with Agnes Mura. He explains how long-term stress and caffeine or other drugs could be affecting three executives, causing their reduced mental and emotional capacity.

We wanted to make sure we included articles that explored how to practically apply the scientific discoveries. We found this bridging of disciplines in Linda Page's contribution exploring what many are calling the new field of “interpersonal neurobiology.” This leads to understanding how it is that coaching literally makes our brains grow and how that growth creates “supersystems,” as people make enduring connections outside their brains. Our brains do not work alone. We need “collaborative, contingent conversations” in the forms of coaching, dialogue and risk-free group conversations to facilitate the learning process. It is time our leaders learn how to engage others in a brain-nourishing way.

David Rock provided a superb article, based on his research and experiences and an interview with Jeffrey M. Schwartz, M.D. The article covers a range of brain functions as they relate to coaching, including attention, insight, reflection and action. David also includes models and approaches which help us better “coach the brains” of our clients. This article alone may inspire you to save this journal as a resource tool for the future.

The article written by one of us, Marcia Reynolds, explores how context plays into making changes. Have you ever wondered why one coaching approach seemed to work miracles with one client but fell flat with another? Marcia offers a model of cognitive development to both help you 1) assess the context your client is thinking with, and 2) determine what questions and statements will open their frames to see new possibilities, accelerating the change process.

Moving into more specific applications, Ginny Whitelaw, Ph.D., wrote a fascinating article based on how we can use the physiology of movement in our coaching. She looks at four energy patterns and provides a way to use this insight as a powerful model to help clients understand their strengths and risk areas. Using her table and descriptions, and the correlations with other temperament, behavioral and social style inventories, Ginny provides us with a clear guide on how we can integrate her work with our present coaching methodologies. Working with these energy patterns can guide us in choosing actions for getting out of ruts and into balance.

Adding a much needed lighter note to this issue, Ray Forbes, Ph.D., showed us

how the legend of King Arthur provides an excellent perceptual lens for viewing the untapped performance potential of present-day coaching clients. We travel back in time to witness the magic of Merlin, one of the world's first successful executive coaches, as he helps Arthur release both Excalibur and his greatest potential using a whole-brain coaching approach. Finally, Mike Jay's Musings will, as always, provocatively challenge assumptions.

We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we did producing it. It was a pleasure working with esteemed experts and colleagues eager to share such a wealth of wisdom. It is truly an honor to present this issue to you.

Agnes Mura
Marcia Reynolds

Co-Editors

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