



The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations

IJCO

Mike's Musings: Neuroscience, Coaching and Leadership: Part 1

Mike R. Jay, Developmentalist

This article first appeared in the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, 2006, 4(2), 77-78. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). Email John Lazar at john@ijco.info for such permission.

Journal information:
www.ijco.info

Purchases:
www.pcpionline.com

2006

ISSN 1553-3735

© Copyright 2006 PCPI.
All rights reserved worldwide.



Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.

Neuroscience, Coaching and Leadership: Part 1

BY MIKE R. JAY, DEVELOPMENTALIST

It seems almost daily now, I'm seeing articles written about the true frontier of science—the human brain—and all of the ramifications that stem from this “wild west of coaching.”

Since this is Mmusing Oone of a two-part musing (Don't miss the next issue where I reveal the model of dynamic engagement for leaders.), I wanted to lay some groundwork for a more encompassing discussion of leadership with ties to neuroscience in my next musing;, so here is another quote: (Guess who might have said this...I bet you can't at first glance!)

“The last few decades have witnessed tremendous advances in the scientific understanding of the human brain and the human body as a whole. Furthermore, with the advent of the new genetics, neuroscience's knowledge of the workings of biological organisms is now brought to the subtlest level of individual genes. This has resulted in unforeseen technological possibilities of even manipulating the very codes of life, thereby giving rise to the likelihood of creating entirely new realities for humanity as a whole. Today the question of science's interface with wider humanity is no longer a matter of academic interest alone; this question must assume a sense of urgency for all those who are concerned about the fate of human existence. I feel, therefore, that a dialogue between neuroscience and society could have profound ben-

MUSINGS MIKE'S

efits in that it may help deepen our basic understanding of what it means to be human and our responsibilities for the natural world we share with other sentient beings.”

[Quote excerpted from a talk given by the Dalai Lama at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience on November 12, 2005 in Washington DC <http://www.mindandlife.org/dalai.lama.sfndc.html>]

I want to sum up my own ideas for understanding neuroscience as a coach.

Clearly, the current underpinnings of coaching are in pop psychology. It may surprise people that I would state something like this in light of my 19 years of experience in coaching, but let's not kid ourselves. As I've studied coaching and coaches and their results for the past 7 years, I realize that most systems of coaching are rooted in the pop psychology of the times...from about 1890 onwards, including brief brushes with James, Baldwin, Piaget and other stalwarts, William Perry and Maslow.

Much of our understanding of coaching has come not from neuroscience but from pop psychology. The reason I use “pop” psychology is that most coaches I know have no real understanding of the psychological theories underpinning their work. I must admit in some cases, my own limitations here as well, lest you think I'm above the fray.

What I see happening now (and this is a warning) is that we are moving from pop psychological theory to pop neuroscience. In large part because it makes some sense to see if there is more we can learn about the brain, and the mind, etc. But the tendency, as I've seen it, is to learn it at the surface and therefore misuse most of the principles while doing coaching.

For myself, I avoid much of the problem by making very clear distinctions about coaching, consulting, and counseling, but nonetheless, find myself at the crossroads of understanding the concilience that needs to occur and is occurring between neuroscience and psychology. Davidson at Wisconsin working through affective neuroscience and neuroplasticity, LeDoux pontificating walking us through cognitive neuroscience in *Synaptic Self*, and even evolutionary neuroscience put forward by Baum in *What Is Thought?* provides interesting manna for our coaching field, if we but understand how to evaluate the science behind the neuron....

And with that, I'll leave you to ponder these resources and invite you to join me in a discussion of dynamic engagement, where the proverbial rubber meets the road in coaching and leadership. While I haven't created the theory of everything, I will attempt to can show you how you mightto utilize the theories of neuroscience and psychology to evaluate leaders, their leadership environment and the leader's proposition through a process of dynamic engagement.

Until then, may your dendrites meet with joy.

Mike Jay

Resource Center for Professional Coaching in Organizations

The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations (IJCO) is the signature publication of Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). In addition to this internationally acclaimed journal, PCPI publishes books on topics of interest to those in the coaching community, whether practitioner, decision maker, or end user. You can count on PCPI, Inc. to provide content that pushes the envelope — bringing theory, research and application together in ways that inform, engage and provoke. Visit the PCPI website, www.pcpionline.com, to view and purchase our growing line of products.

If you have administrative questions, please refer them to our IJCO Office Manager, at officemanager@ijco.info. For advertising, marketing and operations inquiries, please refer them to John Lazar, IJCO Co-Executive Editor, at john@ijco.info. Please submit unsolicited manuscripts for peer review consideration to the IJCO office manager at officemanager@ijco.info.

Visit Both Our Sites at Your Convenience

Journal information:
www.ijco.info

Purchases:
www.pcpionline.com

