

Out of the Box Coaching Newsletter

Science is Catching Up!

by Clarence Thomson



One of the deepest pleasures in life is to be right. When I get to heaven, St. Peter is going to say, "Congratulations, you were right."

In the meantime, one of the pleasures of learning to coach using the Enneagram is when science researchers discover, document, and declare that what Enneagram teachers have known for a long time is now pronounced neurologically demonstrable. Excuse the big words, but scientists have to talk that way to get grants.

A couple of respected researchers, David Rock and Jeff Schwartz (www.strategy-business.com) tell us in "The Neuroscience of Leadership" that the brain prefers stability to change, change is neurologically odious, and so we don't know how to make changes well. Rock and Schwartz point out that behaviorism (carrot and stick) doesn't work, persuasion doesn't work, advice doesn't work, and pointing out mistakes is not only ineffective, but usually makes things worse.

This is bad news because our entire school system and corporate mojo are based on this. An alarming display of this error can be seen when Goldman Sachs says they have to pay their executives \$20,000,000 in bonuses because that's how many carrots they need to retain top talent. That is the final stage of carrot-motivation that started with gold stars for reading and trophies for playing baseball.

This assumption is clear and wrong: "if you reward people, they will do the right thing." If that is wrong, what is the correct assumption? The correct assumption is that we reward ourselves. The assumption of a good Enneagram coach is that the primary reward system is within the brain. When we do what we think is right, our brain rewards us with pleasure.

The problem is that our brain rewards us with pleasure for things that don't work in the external world all the time. This is called dysfunction. We keep doing what doesn't work because our brains reward us for doing what it has always done. Remember: our brains prefer stability. That's why people who are rigid are so sure they're right. Their brain chemistry is at peace. "We've always done it this way" is not just a conservative mantra, it is chemically satisfying.

What do Rock and Schwartz suggest? Well, it seems they have been reading solution-focused coaching like Mary and I have been suggesting for years. What do they say? "Leave problem behaviors in the past, and use solution-focused questioning that facilitates self-insight." This is because the brain is a quantum environment and the mental act of focusing attention stabilizes the associated brain circuits (QZE for the sophisticates).

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NEW BLOGS!

Benefit from
Mary's and
Clarence's
experience
on a regular
basis.

See links
below.

Science is Catching Up! (continued)

So an Enneagram coach uses the Enneagram to help clients see clearly the dysfunctional patterns that have been preventing them from getting what they (their pre-frontal cortex, if you're talking brain centers) consciously want. Most of our thinking is unconscious (the basil ganglia and the amygdala), so to move our behavior into conscious control, we need to move control into consciousness.

We do that by the opening postulate of Enneagram studies. We pay attention to our focus of attention. We hold this truth to be self-evident (after some coaching): focus is power. Focused attention shapes our character, our identity; and with that character we shape reality.

We know this works. Here is my guess as to how it works. When we ask questions, we open up new neurological pathways. When we do enough of that, we actually reorganize the brain (scientists call it a paradigm shift sometimes). Those questions throw the brain into a dynamic state – disequilibrium. Brains don't like that, so they establish a new equilibrium called “insight.” When we get a real insight, we see what we have never seen before and our brain is happy – we can act on what we see and get the reward of our brain oozing chemicals of approval. This is technically called an “aha” experience. It usually comes after sustained attention to what we have not paid attention in the past.

The temptation for coaches is to coach the way we were badly parented and taught in school: point out mistakes. Most of us still have bad memories of our essays returned with red marks telling us of our bad grammar, penmanship, development etc.

But you also had a loved teacher who told you that you had potential. Who suggested new places to look. Asked your opinion. And said to trust yourself. Google's creative people spend 20% of their time working on whatever they want to.

It takes business and science a long careful time to learn what coaches and spiritual teachers have been teaching for years. Follow your bliss.

Follow your bliss all right. But realize that bliss is ambiguous. Ignorance is bliss! (Stable brain chemistry). What spiritual teachers and coaches mean is that when you stay open (or have a good coach open you with questions), you will be able to enjoy the pleasure of a constantly changing brain that rewards you with chemicals secreted by behaviors that work in the external world. Ahem. All the coach needs to know is what questions to ask!



The way you stay open (neuroplasticity if you must), is by prolonged, focused, reinforced attention.

This is not easy, neither easily understood nor executed. Researchers know that – training seldom works unless it is followed up with coaching. That's why the Enneagram coach begins with awareness of attention patterns that don't work (our Enneagram style), and suggests and requests ways for clients to support new attention patterns.

DEVELOP YOUR NEUROPLASTICITY!

Follow Mary's and Clarence's blogs:

Mary: <http://www.breakoutofthebox.com/blogs.htm>

Clarence: <http://enneagramcentralcoach.blogspot.com>