

Neuroscience of Why Coaching Works

By Ann Golden Eglé, MCC

Feeling unfocused, indecisive, overly impatient or reactive? Finding your days to increasingly look like this: too much to do, too little time, too many deadlines? Wonder why what worked for you in the past will no longer produce the same results? Is genuine happiness and balance even possible?

If this sounds familiar, chances are that your brain is not functioning at its optimal level. Your brain is continually changing—old neural pathways (positive and negative) become more solidified through repetitive thinking, while new pathways (brand new ways of thinking and experiencing the world around you) are always possible yet need encouragement.

The chemicals in your brain continually react to the stressors of your day. Your brain requires four areas of focus to level out the chemicals and function at its highest capacity:

- **Sleep**—7-8 hours per night
- **Diet**—pay attention dieters, your brain loves olive oil and fats
- **Exercise**—at least 30 minutes per day, every day
- **Challenge**—powerful questions, new insights, experiences, surprises

The 'challenge', which continually forms new neural pathways, is where professional coaching comes into the picture. Imagine two ways to communicate a needed change in a subordinate:

- 1) **Tell them:** When you *tell* someone that they need to change, it can activate a negative, reactive part of the brain that creates defensiveness or confusion (strengthening old pathways). Clients report spending hours begrudgingly making a change that they didn't fully understand only to disappoint their superior in having not done it right. Thus, increased resentment for both.
- 2) **Ask and Challenge:** When you ask or present an intriguing challenge around a change that will enhance a person's effectiveness, it can activate a positive area in the brain. The recipient begins to think of new strategies, stimulating creativity, pride, confidence, and brand new positive neural pathways upon which to build.

A recent article I read in the [Eugene Register Guard](#) stated that by age 80, the majority of individuals currently in the 40-60 age groups will experience dementia. That in itself is reason enough to create these new neural pathways.

Here are my **Top '7' Tips** on how coaching works to stimulate new, positive neural pathways in your brain. As your executive or leadership coach, I would ask or challenge you to:

- 1) **Rethink old thinking.** If a previous approach no longer brings energy, vitality or a solution to a situation, let it go. Continually open up to new approaches to old challenges.
- 2) **Find new perspectives.** Ask yourself and others what you're missing. Research, call authors or experts across the nation, visit new regions or businesses outside of your field to gain new perspectives around what's possible.
- 3) **Create discomfort.** Your mode of comfort may be laboring at your desk for hours, taking things far too seriously. Lighten up. You cannot force creativity. It must come to you. Do something beyond your comfort zone such as spending an afternoon sitting in a park, noticing sights, sounds and colors that previously escaped you. Allow your intuition to quietly bring new insight to your brain.
- 4) **Play.** Get outside. Play a game with your kids, enjoy time at a pool listening to the laughter, watch a little league game, find a new hike, kayak or enjoy the art of stand up paddling. So much to do to stimulate your brain in Bend, Oregon!
- 5) **Move your body.** It's not uncommon for me to stop a coaching session to ask a stuck client to do ten jumping jacks to stimulate new thinking. Impossible in your setting? Go to the bathroom and mimic a jumping jacks in slow motion. Enjoy your inner giggle and the creativity that it brings about.
- 6) **Reframe inner 'telling' into 'questioning'.** Stop hardening old neural pathways that no longer support you. Rather than telling yourself the same old drama over and over again, question it. What is true? What are my options? How am I selling myself short?
- 7) **Seek professional help.** You may be too close to your own situation. Weekly I hear this from clients: "Wow—I never thought of it in that way!" "Yikes, I can't believe I missed that!" "How can it be that easy?" "I feel energized with this new perspective." Coaches, therapists, ministers and trainers are among professional resources eager to serve you.

You owe it to yourself to take the absolute best care of your brain. To answer the question posed in the first paragraph above, yes, genuine happiness, fulfillment and balance are possible if you commit to continually seeing life in new perspectives. I challenge you to claim one of these tips and put it into practice starting today. Or, create your own challenge, today.

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