ForeWord Reviews

SCIENCE

Brainwork: The Neuroscience Behind How We Lead Others
David A. Sousa
Triple Nickle Press
978-0-9833020-3-2
(Feb 29, 2012)

Results of scientific studies are frequently reported between breaking news without much context or application. In *Brainwork*, Dr. David Sousa succinctly explains how business executives can apply the findings of recent reports on neuroscience to improve daily decision-making, leadership, and personal health.

As an internationally renowned expert in the field, with fifteen books and degrees from Harvard and Rutgers, Sousa combines his science and education training with his executive experience to summarize complex neuroscience findings for non-scientists. He does so with a focus on applying the wisdom to our careers, rather than on the science itself.

In each of the seven chapters cited below, Sousa briefly shares real-life stories and research before his lengthier instruction on how to apply the findings. Exercises and short quizzes are included to spur active reading and immediate application.

"The Curse of Too Much Information": Having a lot of information on any topic is often shown to lead to decision paralysis, feeling overwhelmed, and regretting decisions—both good and bad. Sousa provides eight methods on how to become "satisficers," who can accept the good-enough, rather than being "maximizers," who always need the best.

"The Myth of Multitasking": While introducing us to his concepts of "alternate tasking" and "sequential tasking," Sousa demonstrates that multitasking, as one commonly thinks of it, is not possible. What's even more disturbing is that constant attempts to multitask actually harm intelligence and memory, lower analytical reasoning ability, slow work, and increase the number of errors made. He provides suggestions for how to focus on tasks and six beneficial results of abandoning the goal of multitasking.

"Respecting the Emotional Brain": The old adage about business not being personal is clearly undermined by this exploration of the differences between the "rational brain" and the "emotional brain" and of the important role emotions play in our ability to be leaders. Given that the part of the brain that controls emotions processes information differently, before, and even faster than the logical part of the brain, Sousa advises us to pay attention to our emotions. This

principle of “emotional intelligence” is explored regarding our ability to be self-aware, to have relationships, and to handle stress, crisis, and change in the workplace.

“Improving Your Thinking”: Sousa replaced the left-brain versus right-brain paradigm with discussions of “cognitive” and “higher order” thinking and of “logical” versus “holistic” thinking preferences. He describes the “five major cerebral forces” that true leaders possess and the five “habits of mind” that influence our decision-making. By knowing these methods of thinking, one can better understand decisions and potential blind spots. The closing section on the importance of creativity and on how to foster it is particularly enlightening.

“Leading by Dissent”: Sousa explains that for teamwork to succeed meaningfully, groups need to be balanced and able to foster dissent during discussions. He includes ten ways to deal with the stress resulting from working in teams and offers some tips for dealing with coworkers’ stress. He also mentions persuasive research on the importance of appropriate humor in the workplace.

“Moral and Ethical Leadership”: The author investigates how the brain makes different kinds of moral and ethical decisions, including discussions of right-versus-right dilemmas and right-versus-wrong dilemmas, whistleblowers and retribution, and four ethical frameworks. The worksheet for ethical decision-making is immediately useful.

“Taking Care of Your Brain”: In closing, Sousa explains the seven essential components to maintaining a healthy brain, as well as the importance of exercise and sleep. The effects of meditating and of playing video games will likely surprise some readers.

Brainwork is an approachable guide to applying the findings of complex scientific research in daily professional lives. It is far from being a typical self-help or popular leadership book. While written for top business executives, Sousa’s conclusions are equally helpful to middle managers and leaders of non-profit organizations. *Brainwork* is highly recommended for all who lead, manage, or seek to influence others.?

C. William Gee