



# HOW TRUSTWORTHY ARE YOU -- REALLY?

## THE NEUROSCIENTIFIC and BUSINESS ARGUMENT FOR TRUST



By Katharine McLennan  
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IN THIS ERA OF THE IMAGINATION AGE, now more than ever we must develop a culture of TRUST in which ideas and people can flourish. "Expertise" is fleeting in a world where knowledge has become a commodity and "I don't know" is a sign that progress could be around the corner . . . as long as FEAR does not destroy the optimism to create something that a customer needs better and more efficiently than anyone else can create.

Yet now more than ever, we have cultures that are still designed for the industrial Age, where we are afraid to fail, we are afraid to deal with people who think outside the box, and we become complete distraction machines addicted to the bings of the email inbox and the coffee at the very least. We call for "Teams!" but we are not educated in our school systems on how to succeed through teams and instead are rewarded in individual ranking and

tasks that are designed for working in isolation. The rise of ADHD and all kinds of immune systems are fascinating those that know the mind-brain connections behind physical disease and the costs to our systems of the constant flushing of cortisol, the stress hormone.

Those of us in the workplace who can use our mind to recognise stress and call it for what it is: False Evidence Appearing Real, are able to transform the emotional energy of

fear into courage and create an organisation of trust in which employees can thrive. They feel safe and therefore operate out of their frontal lobes to think new thoughts instead of their mammalian fear circuitry to repeat

last year's performance +/- 10%.

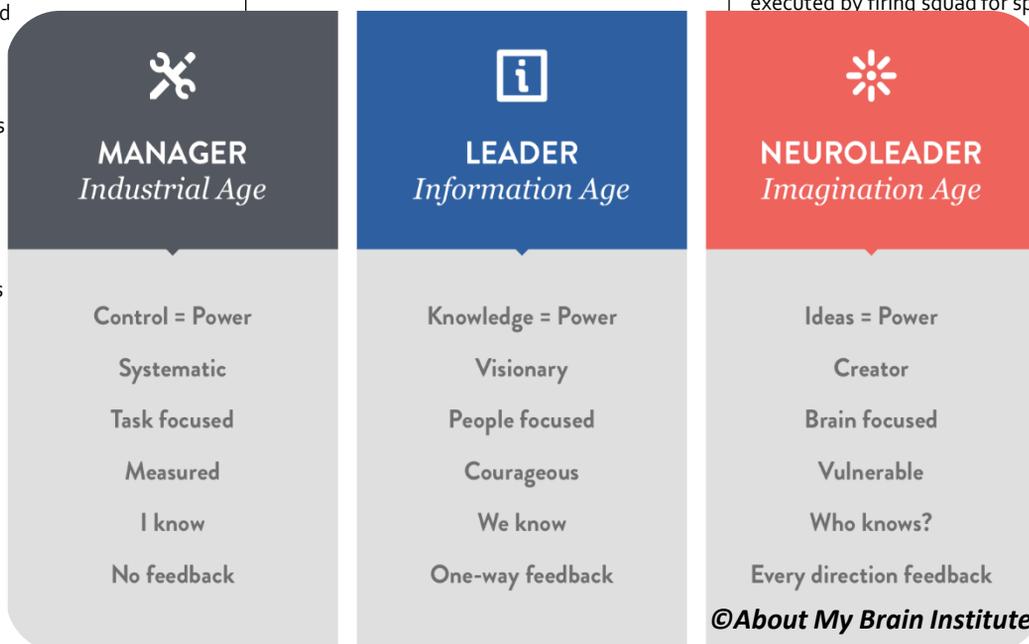
This article will cover the following:

- Why we are now in a new era requiring trust and vulnerability
- Why this era takes a lot of brain retraining to get us back into the frontal lobe, naturally rebuilding our supplies of endorphins, dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin and reducing our production of cortisol and adrenaline

**The Industrial Age**

At this point, a hundred years ago, the last Russian Tsar abdicates amidst the Russian Revolution and the US President Woodrow Wilson asks Congress to declare war against Germany. The Suffragettes make their first protest outside the White House for the right to vote. Babe Ruth is pitching for the Red Sox. The Germans begin their air attacks on England. The Dutch dancer Mata Hari is executed by firing squad for spying for

Germany. The leadership model we needed for most of the last century was based on a Manager who had control of physical assets and equity and could leverage this capital to gain the most return on equity through efficiency, repetition, scale and scope. The Industrial Age



- How we as leaders must D.R.I.V.E. a culture of trust – that is "F.E.A.R.S." – free
- How we as leaders can build our own trustworthiness

Occurred between 1800 and 1960 as humans created tools and machines that fostered our manipulation of nature. The Industrial Age's leadership model was based on top-down and directive autocracy.



The leader at the top was expected to know more about the organisation and the market than anyone else in the company and therefore have the most informed view of what actions to take. Strict rules were in place, and accountability infringements had consequences. In this model, the workers were not expected or empowered to think for themselves.

At the centre of this Manager's craft was politics: knowing how to manage upwards and across to win allies, knowing how to demonstrate promotion worthiness and knowing how to protect his flanks from attacks from both within and from the market. The art of "P.R." for management would have been established at this time, as external and internal communications departments arose and began to track not only the reputation of the companies externally, but also the reputation in the top 100 lists of influential leaders.

As pressures for a more participative management model began to grow with workers demanding a greater say in their work, a more democratic leader needed to emerge. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we wrote many articles distinguishing Leadership from Management, arguing that people follow their Manager because they had to, but the followed leaders because they wanted to. We began to seek a "visionary" leader, a leader who could see through to the future, painting the perfect pitch to the more and more data-hungry Wall Street analysts made famous in the 1980's.

In this 20<sup>th</sup> Century, one could begin their career as an individual contributor and work her way up from Supervisor to Manager and then finally reach the superior class of "leader" – if she were successful. Ram Charan and Steve Drotter's influential work in *The Leadership Pipeline* (Charan & Drotter 2000) was very useful in this, alongside Elliot Jacques' Requisite Organization (Jacques 1989). A successful leader had to respect the differences he would have in the people working for him across their different contexts. Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard's Situational Leadership model guided these leaders on when to coach, when to direct, when to delegate and when to support (Hersey & Blanchard 1969).

In the 1990s, Edward Deming's Total Quality Management reigned. Process Re-engineering was all the rage amongst management consultants as efforts to reduce cost and drive efficiency were made. Logic reigned. Businesses were represented as closed systems of complexity, and we became enthralled with how much we could measure, benchmark and exhibit by the newly emerging tools of Excel and PowerPoint.

The world "culture" still referred to the ethnicity of our workforce – and General Electric ruled in the definition of leadership with its concepts of leadership pipeline and the nine-box grid of measureable potential and performance. We got lost in hundreds of hours of performance management and the introduction of Jacques' Requisite 7-layer of complexity to design our corporations of complexity (Jacques 1989).

I am old enough to at least reflect on the last decade of the Industrial Age. Indeed, in 2015 when I teleported my virtual self instantaneously from Sydney to Washington DC via YouTube in a digital message to my former high school classmate, I reflected on the figures and events in leadership in 1985: Ronald Reagan, General Secretary Gorbachev, Pope John Paul II and a female Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher. Thanks Maggie and Queen Elizabeth II for getting a woman in there somewhere – not to mention Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

At the same time, the French were sinking the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland, the FDA was developing a blood screening test for AIDS and the first heart transplant was being done. The movie Back to the Future debuted in 1985, forecasting what 2015 would look like, actually getting right wearable technology, videoconferencing, mobile payment, virtual reality and drones.

*(I dare you to write about 2030-you will only see it when you believe it).*

### The Information Age

IN the same year I attended the high school reunion virtually, I also attended the 20<sup>th</sup> reunion of my Stanford Business School class of 1995 'old-school style' in the flesh via the airplane tube. When I think of that intervening decade of 1985 to 1995, I recognise that just as I was leaving Stanford in 1995, we were entering an age that called for a new model of leadership.

In my graduating class were Jeff Skoll, one of the founders of eBay, as well as the venture capitalist behind Hotmail, Steve Jurvetson. At the reunion, I reflect on Warren Buffet speaking to my corporate investment class in 1995 about avoiding technology investment, as he argued it would never be as reliable as the steel-capped boot industries of the world.

Begin reminded of the dot.com crash in 2001, he had some point, but if his close friendship with Bill Gates is anything to reflect on, even Warren would have had to

Agree that with 1995's Netscape getting listed, we had entered a new age of Information. It was not ONLY about who had the most physical property—it was also about who could get to information the fastest, distribute it across the relevant value chain most effectively and grow that information most exponentially.

with the arrival of electronic email, the consulting houses of McKinsey, Booz-Allen & Hamilton, BCG and Bain would flourish in the race to harness information as a leveraging point as they learned to share and leverage global know-how the quickest.

In this Information Age, leadership changed from managerial to visionary—he who had the most knowledge and the most compelling picture of a future could rise to the top. We extolled our leaders during the 1990s as we watched Louis Gerstner, Andy Groves, Jeff Bezos, Michael Dell and Bill Gates reinvent the way we grew capital and how fast we could grow markets.

We created our own version of global Greco-Roman theatre at the launch of the latest technology by Microsoft and Apple. We rewarded our leaders with more and more share options. Our Boards became obsessed with the complexity and fairness of short-term and long-term incentives, as their very survival depended on their satisfaction that these remuneration structures were truly rewarding real value being created.





In leadership development in the Information Age, we began to teach our leaders more than just the requisite managerial skills of delegating, project management, resource allocation, capital management and running efficient team meetings. We began to see that the ancient art of conversation and Socratic questioning must be restored. As one-way feedback became an important tool, the rise of the Leadership Coach began. We started to combine the insight of the psychologist with the wisdom of the strategic advisor – our society's latest incarnation of the Court Jester for the King.

John Whitmore provided the world with the coaching GROW model which we could follow when we wanted to convert our mindsets to become better leaders (Whitmore 1992). Leadership 360 tools became the weapon of choice to open our human psyches to a new understanding of how we were being "seen" by our people, peers and managers.

With Daniel Goleman, we adopted the term 'emotional intelligence.' we began to agree that perhaps humans were emotional at work as well as home –and that IQ wasn't all that we needed (Goleman 1996). Some of us dared to add Spiritual Intelligence as a trifecta of IQ, EQ and SQ, looking for that perfect all –round Renaissance leader.

As we celebrated the resourcefulness of everyone, we saw hundreds of versions of the "high performance" team models and how to create and sustain one. All were various iterations forming, storming, norming and performing.

We dared to suggest that self-managed teams could actually lead organisations without having the smartest guy at the top dictate the daily instructions. Even more challenging to hierarchical mindsets was Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership: the leader at the top being there to serve the employees, the client, the shareholders and the community (Greenleaf 1977).

But most of us were papering these new tools and techniques over a leadership model that remained, at its heart, Command and Control. When Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008 following hot on the heels of Enron and Arthur Andersen, we went back to revel in methodologies such as Lean Six Sigma and Agile Workforces, while we worked under and extraordinarily increased amount of regulation.

Sadly we never reached the promised land of "Change We Can Believe in" that Obama enticed us with in his 2008 election victory. The day he was elected was an extraordinary day of possibility in so many ways – perhaps we have all taken it for granted over the last decade in our determination to see only mediocrity. We were insistent that the world was simply complex, not chaotic and could

## The Information Age and Trust allowed Sydney Olympics to be the success it was (not to mention a few other items)

The City of Sydney won the right to host the Olympics in 1993, arguably in the "Industrial Age," an age when information was still being transferred largely by facsimile and telephone and photocopy.

I had the honour of joining the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) in October of 1996 as Program Manager for Operational Integration, in charge of conceptualising and then driving the operating planning for the Games. At the time I joined, we had 100 staff for SOCOG. We would grow our forces from 100 to 3000 paid staff, 60,000 volunteers and 70,000 contractors by 15 September 2000 across 40 functions, 40 venues, 5 cities, 220 visiting countries, 10,000 visiting athletes, 5000 officials and thousands of press, broadcasters and sponsors.

What we had that no prior Olympics had was . . . the arrival of the Information Age – two absolutely magic ingredients:

- Netscape going public in 1996 was an indication that the world of internet had gone global AND
- The Atlanta 1996 to Sydney 2000 was the first ever English to English Olympic transition Games ever in history

I am forever indebted to the Information Age arriving and my dear colleagues from Atlanta for the hours and hours that they spent with me and the thousands of planning documents that they did not have to fax to me or ship to me in photocopy form. This was one of the critical factors of success for Sydney – not to mention two major favours from the gods: the weather and the lack of terrorism.



be managed as such.

The new generation of leaders is different. When Stanford advertised for people to do their MBA in 1993, they argued that 70% of those graduating would be able to secure a job with a Fortune 100 company within six months. Having attended my reunion twenty years later, this advertisement has drastically changed. Now Stanford cites that 70% of those graduating will be starting their own company –and even starting it while they are studying.

These individuals entering the workforce are at their highest productivity when they understand the desired results, have the resources to get the job done, and are left alone to get results. Heavy supervision irritates them, motivating them to leave companies that limit their freedom to perform.

In fact, 'Diversity and inclusion' policies incessantly searching for a solution to getting more women into senior positions in a large corporations often overlook the very culture that these amazingly independent and courageous women require to thrive.

Having a look around at the 100 women I graduated with at Stanford twenty years after we graduated, I was not amazed to find that 90% of them choose not to work for corporation and instead adore the freedom, creativity, accountability and results-driven focus of running their own entrepreneurial companies. They have more time and often far more money to live the life they want – with time for their families, their communities and for themselves.

## The Imagination Age

The arrival of Uber, Paypal and Airbnb is a relief to us. Perhaps we are now back on some kind of expansionary path in seeing the world in very different ways – unexpected ways.

Unlike the Industrial Age's 150-year reign, the Information Age seems to have come and gone over 20-30 years. Now something new is brewing, something that is evoking different leadership models. Witnessing the launch of Tesla's Home Battery that powers our homes through the solar panels on our roof makes me think that we do have a future amidst the chaos of terrorism and environmental destruction.

Whilst control of physical assets and access to information are helpful to a successful strategy, they are no longer sufficient to create value sustainably. A third element is required – the asset of creativity. This asset requires organisations to be nimble, courageous,



trustworthy and forgiving. These organisations are places where ANYONE can be a leader and in fact, must be a leader, which is this time defined as a "creator."

Teams and companies come together from all over the world, coordinating virtually to accomplish things we would never have dreamed of even a decade ago. They disband just as rapidly to re-form in another geography for another project. Each person must lead the group around them through different elements of personal power, that is less and less defined by a location on the hierarchy of the org chart but rather by the influence of their idea.

No one member of the team can now come up with the idea themselves –and the Wisdom of the Crowds does really prevail (Surowiecki 2004). In fact, a leader in this world must be trained to accept vulnerability in the face of NOT knowing, because it is in the rested beginner's mind that new ideas will emerge. So from the Industrial Age of Deming to the Information Age of Gates and Jobs, we enter the Imagination Age of leadership with no clear role models – yet.

Ervin Laszlo, the Hungarian philosopher of science, systems theorist, and integral theorist, writes that we have arrived at a "Chaos point" in which we must now choose a future of evolution or a future of extinction. Laszlo (2006) identified 2012 as the world at the crossroads, where it can either devolved towards untenable disaster or become the "gateway" to a "new epoch of planetary development" and the birth of a "radically new kind of consciousness." If it is indeed the latter that is borne out, he saw this new world flourishing by 2025.

To flourish, we must integrate the best of our insights in technology and science with lessons we have learned from our short history on earth socially, economically, and politically, and with the ancient sources of wisdom that have accompanied us throughout.

This leader may be created from the highly sophisticated left-brained capitalist who led us through the Industrial Age and who learned to leverage information assets to produce amazing companies arriving overnight. But these leaders will need to activate the rest of themselves to help us in this new age. They need to unlock and leverage their creativity.

Millennials are arriving into our workforce who know how to collaborate far more than we do. They have been better educated about working in groups than any other generation and their digital networks and instinct to collaborate rather than compete are far more developed. They don't want to be constrained by devotion to one team and they need to move across teams regularly.

In some ways, 2017 might indeed mark a

"Back to the future," as these Millennials in their own version of covered wagons become the pioneers of our next decades. Instead of pickaxes and ploughshares, they will use data, networks and robotics. They won't be constrained by geographic, cultural, gender or language barriers. That the World is Flat (Friedman 2007) is taken as a given to them. No part of the world is considered overly adventurous to them. A variety of new arrangements for global working will emerge. People from all over the world will transact via eBay-inspired bids that allow someone in Mongolia to contract someone in Ecuador and be coordinated by someone in New Zealand.

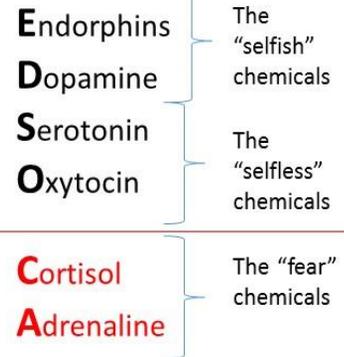
A leader will now be responsible for coordinating the big picture and contracting a wide range of independent workers and consortia to deliver on it. They will need to develop superior skills of innovation requiring imagination and a systemic "seeing" of how all the parts fit together to make a coherent whole.

Successful leadership will master the art of collaboration, connecting independent performers into networks focused on specific goal accomplishment. Motivations for these people will include various forms of compensation, but will be strongly focused on making a positive difference for others and the world around them.

These leaders will know how to influence rapid waves of innovation that alternate with execution, with an agility of resources that can constantly adjust to the new horizon that emerges with each stage of development. As with the pioneers of ancient times, the ability to adapt to meet the unexpected will be critical. The leader who is in the highest health of mental fitness will succeed.

## The Neurochemicals we need (more than ever) for the Imagination Age

There is nothing new about the neurochemistry we will need to survive the Imagination Age. We as the Homo Sapiens race relied on this very neurochemistry to survive above all other species during pre-historic "cave man" times when all other species similar to ours did not actually make it. What is fascinating, however, is that we as the Homo Sapiens race are an extraordinarily forgetful race and tend to forget the wisdom of our ancient philosophers and teachers which have stood the test of time about how to ensure that we keep our bodies and brains at the peak of mental agility. The calls for the "Mindfulness" revolution are amusing when we realise we have been calling for mindfulness for thousands of years in one way or another. It is now only with the gift of



technology that ironically we have both:

- The causes of our utter distraction from mindfulness, mental health, physical health and spiritual health but at the same time
- The ability to physically see with technology the destruction of our brains with our very own eyes

We are at last at the point where the Imagination Age can also be the Integration Age, and we can begin to return to our ancient roots of wisdom with an integration movement – integrating Western and Eastern medicine for example, or integrating the many separate university research departments to form new ways of solving intractable world issues, integrating the university sector with the corporate sector and the government and non-profit sector to direct solutions that will help us live in a world that can sustain our population for many more years than what we ever thought possible.

Simon Sinek coined the leadership chemical cocktail the "EDSO" cocktail: endorphins, dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin. Our Industrial Age form of achievement and individual leadership always called for a fair amount of the selfish "E" and the "D." Endorphins are a group of hormones secreted within the brain that diminish our perceptions of pain. We need these to get us through work-outs and help us endure difficulties. These endorphins have been essential for the rise of the 70+hour weeks and the back-breaking economy class seat journeys.

Dopamine is an amine that acts as a neurotransmitter in the brain with the purpose of motivating us to achieve incremental goals. It is what rewards us and motivates us to "achieve." It is like the "greed" function of our brain. As we tick off things on a to-do list, we emit little shots of dopamine. Dopamine is something to watch out for – because it is highly addictive. In the recent decades, we have seen our addiction to dopamine go out of



control. The rise of alcoholism, gambling, and drug addiction are all examples of the need for more and more dopamine. But so is the need for more and more performance and more and more cell phone time -- and more and more work. The occurrence of attention deficit across our children and our adults is at an all-time high because of our inability to "stop" the need for the "hit." This is of critical concern to the physical limitations of our body and the impact it is having on sleep, the very source of our rejuvenation, new ideas, and restoration.

Hand in hand with this is the rise of all-day emissions of cortisol and adrenaline, which we as the Homo Sapiens race were only supposed to experience in the very infrequent times we experience life-or-death experiences. These days, however, stress at work experienced is also causing cortisol and adrenaline surges, which in turn are shutting down our immune system, our digestive system, our growth systems, our circulatory systems. Diseases in these conditions run rampant.

Whilst we cannot change the pace of technological change and disruptions of the economy, we CAN go back to the wisdom of our ancient ancestors and remember how to train our bodies and our minds. The wisdom has always been there. We just have forgotten it. In this Imagination Age, now more than ever, we need the two neurochemicals of Trust: "S" and "O", serotonin and oxytocin.

Serotonin is a monoamine neurotransmitter that provides the feeling of significance, pride and status. It drives us to seek the recognition of others. In wanting to build up serotonin, we seek to do things in order to build up loyalty and allegiance, making our tribe proud of us, doing it "for my mother, for my boss, for my husband." In our quest to get our serotonin levels up, we reinforce our sense of relationships with the group and this helps us enormously in the building of organisational cohesion.

Oxytocin is a hormone that acts as a neurotransmitter and creates the sense of intimacy and trust and the feeling that someone will protect us. In experiments that neuroscientists are now running, we can actually predict the willingness to trust and someone's trustworthiness by the amount of oxytocin in their system. We can inject oxytocin in humans to increase their trust, and we can see it actually increase when they are trusted.

Interestingly enough, high stress is a potent oxytocin inhibitor. At the same time, oxytocin increases a person's empathy, which creates a virtuous circle of increase in oxytocin, increase in empathy, increase in trust. Paul Zak, the founding director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies has studied trust in organisations neurochemically and behaviourally for over a decade and has

## The Return on Trust

In comparison with the bottom quartile, companies that score in the top quartile on the eight Trust Behaviours have:

- 106% more energy
- 13% fewer sick days
- 29% more satisfaction with their lives
- 76% more engagement
- 50% more productivity
- 50% more likelihood to stay with the employer over the next year
- 88% more recommendations to family and friends of the company as a great place to work
- 60% more enjoyment of work
- 70% more aligned with purpose
- 66% closer to colleagues
- 11% more empathy with workplaces
- 40% less burnout
- 41% more a greater sense of accomplishment
- 17% or \$6450 a year more earned by these employees
- Trust organisations experience 32 x greater risk taking, 11 x more innovation, 6x higher performance

*Paul J. Zak, The Neuroscience of Trust, Harvard Business Review, January-February 2017 based on survey of 1095 working adults in the US and Ken Blanchard, 2013, Trust Works*

been able to measure increases in oxytocin to show the levels of trust in organisations. At certain levels of trust, he has been able to identify eight management behaviours that foster trust which he can measure in order to improve performance:

1. *Recognise excellence:* particularly when:
  - a. Immediately after goal met
  - b. Comes from peers
  - c. Tangible
  - d. Unexpected
  - e. Personal
  - f. Public
2. *Induce 'challenge stress'* – assigning your people a difficult BUT achievable job which releases oxytocin and adrenocorticotropin that will intensify people's focus and strengthen social connections at the same time. The challenge must be attainable and clear. Leaders must check in regularly.
3. *Give people discretion in how they do their work* – autonomy promotes innovation allowing different people to try different approaches
4. *Enable job crafting* – trust employees to choose which projects they'll work on, focusing their energies on what they care about most
5. *Share information broadly* – to ensure there is certainty about the company's direction. Uncertainty leads to chronic stress which will inhibit oxytocin and undermine teamwork.
6. *Intentionally build relationships* – we have been trained in our generation to get tasks done, not make friends. Neuroscience experiments are now showing that when people intentionally build social ties at work at their performance improves.
7. *Facilitate whole-person growth*—high-trust workplaces help people develop personally as well as professionally. Acquiring new work skills isn't enough; if you're not growing holistically as a human being, your performance will suffer. People in workplaces now want to understand how they are growing in their careers as whole people and want to talk about work-life integration, family and time for recreation and reflection.
8. *Show vulnerability*---leaders in high-trust workplaces ask for help and this stimulates oxytocin, increasing trust and collaboration. Asking for help is a sign of a secure leader

And the return on these behaviours in creating high trust workplaces? See the side panel



# The Culture that we need for this Brain ...(and therefore Trust)....to Thrive

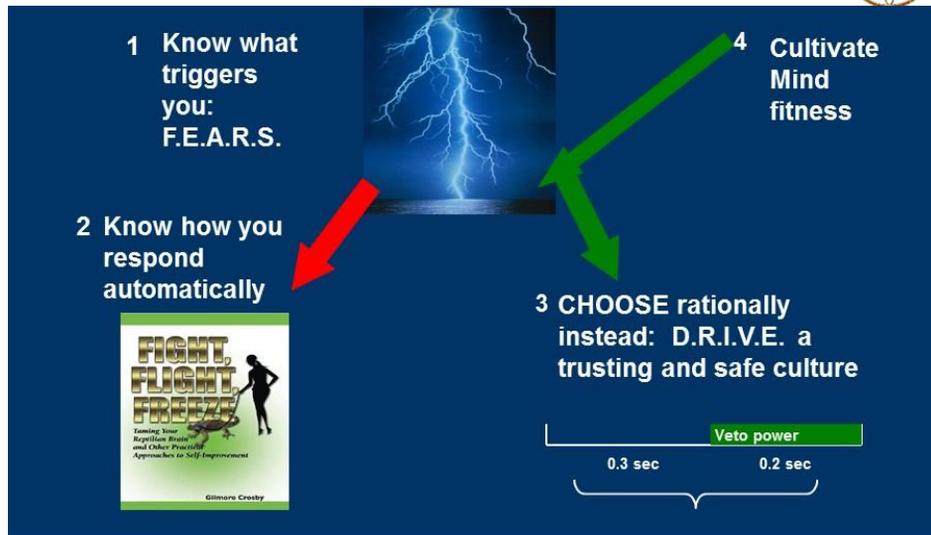
The rising interest in neuroscientific applications to business leadership introduces other views which complement and also challenge evolutionary psychology. The very awareness of the hardwired circuits that we have inherited from our Stone Age ancestors allows us to choose the creation of new ones with conscious intention. Neuroscientists are now telling us that our brain is “neuroplastic”—meaning that we have the ability to create new circuits (neuron connections) throughout our life, especially with attention and repetition. As we can catch ourselves in the act of “Stone Age” behaviour, we can use our more rational and most recently evolved frontal cortex to use reason in order to intervene and thereby carefully and optimistically take the road less travelled by á la Robert Frost.

To the right is a four-step model that we will follow in this discussion:

## 1. Know what triggers you: F.E.A.R.S.

One of the things we find interesting about 21-st century office life is that our brains often mistake common everyday stresses as life-and-death threats. When we are triggered by such threats, our more ancestral part of our mind—the emotional limbic system often characterised by an overactive amygdala—consumes the resources (oxygen and glucose) of the brain, making fewer resources available for the overall executive functions we use in our prefrontal cortex, the source of our rational mind and our creative, working memory.

Daniel Goleman coined this process the “amygdala hijack” in his book Emotional Intelligence (Goleman 1996). Under threat the brain is also “hyperactive,” resulting in us missing the subtle clues of opportunity of an “aha” in the market. This hyperactivation makes us generalise more which increases the likelihood of accidental connections that don’t reflect what is truly happening in the market. All told, the result is that employees tend to err on the safe side, shrink from the opportunities that are perceived to be more dangerous, blow up small stressors into large stressors, and withdraw their participation in a team that may be threatening to their status.



Essentially, what results is that all employees decide to take the road more travelled by and hunker down until they feel safe again. It is very helpful, then, to know what these “F.E.A.R.S.” are and how to D.R.I.V.E. their opposite in order to establish a safe environment. In this environment, the leader ensures their employees have the best chance to make the most use of their rational and creative minds and the least amygdala hijacks, the least distractions, the least attention deficits, and the least disease states.

**F = Fuzzy Vision, unclear direction**

vs.

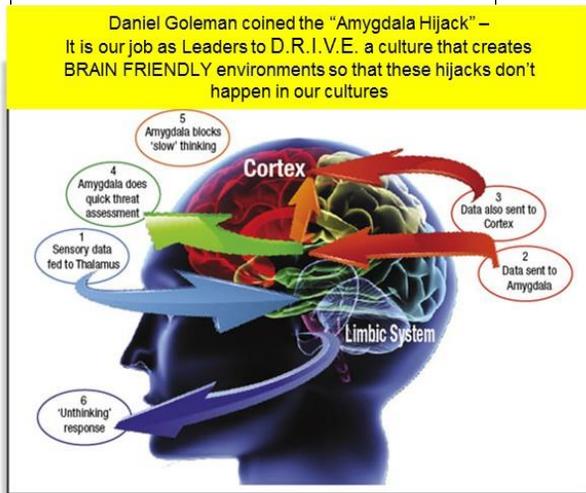
**D = Defined reality and future**

The lack of a vision, a strategy and a plan for people to follow will absolutely trigger the fear response. Our brains crave certainty and operate only because of memorised patterns. For example, we are able to drive a car unconsciously from home to work without even realising because of our memory. We

are barely awake. Any change in our normal route will wake our brain up and it will sense an “error,” which could trigger the automatic fear response if conditions are warranted and there are no directions any longer. In contrast, the act of creating perceived certainty is rewarding in our brain. How soothing is it to enjoy the repeating patterns in music or doing something that comes naturally to us?

Now consider the complete lack of certainty in today’s “Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous” environment. It is absolutely essential that the leaders address this uncertainty both in their mind and in the minds of their followers. Regardless of whether they can truly see a clear way through the morass, they must work to define roles, lay out expectations, define the tactics, and provide the vision to their people, whose brains are not settling in the turmoil. There is no doubt that their tactics and visions will completely adjust day in and day out, but without that perceived certainty, employees will simply fritter their days away in anxiety, when they could have been calmly seeing the market opportunities and going after those.

We can create certainty in every hour in just little ways: being clear about the meeting’s purpose and when it will end, being clear about when and how decisions about jobs will be made, or about when we will come back to a client. “Tell people what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them.”



**E= Exclusive cliques with secret rules**

Vs.

**R=Relationships**

Being part of the tribe is one of the critical ingredients to survival, and as soon as we feel that we are outside a group, our brain functioning will start to experience the fight or flight syndrome. Neuroscientists Matt Lieberman and Naomi Eisenberger work with functional MRI and a computerised simulation of a ball throwing game by several players (*Lieberman and Eisenberger, 2008*). At a point in the game, the participant suddenly experiences not being thrown the ball, and the MRI picks up a response that is actually identical in strength and location in the brain to physical pain. Leaders need to watch the degree of relatedness in their people, as we all have different levels of need for it. When they begin to detect a person withdrawing from the group or the group creating an outcast, there will be serious performance declines in the work.

Trust is actually the basis of relatedness, but it's not a warm and fuzzy trust for the sake of it. David Maister, noted expert on the "trusted advisor," has a formula for trusting someone which is based on four components (*Maister, 2000*): credibility of the person through their talent and skills; reliability of the person; intimacy that you have with the person and your own self-orientation towards the world in general. Each of these four components can be strengthened by leaders to ensure that relatedness in their workforce is strong, which will be particularly essential in the recession. We see once again that trust matters. Without trust once again, we are at amygdala hijack stage. Over the years, I have used this trust equation many times successfully with teams but I have substituted the denominator of the self-orientation towards the world in general and used this formula:

$$\text{Trust} = \frac{\text{Credibility} + \text{Reliability} + \text{Intimacy}}{\text{(the need to be right)}}$$

The "need to be right" ruins all glimmers of any hope of trust or relatedness.

**A= Autocratic micromanagement**

Vs.

**I= Independence**

Neuroscience also tells us that once we have the certainty, we then want the autonomy to go after our objective. People invading our autonomy by micro-managing take perceived control away from us, which also causes us to go into survival mode. Interestingly enough, working in teams is difficult for many of us because we subconsciously perceive a decline in our



**D**efined Reality/Future

**R**elationships

**I**ndependence

**V**alued talents

**E**quity of comparable inputs and outcomes



OUT THE



**F**uzzy Vision, unclear direction

**E**xclusive cliques with secret rules

**A**utocratic micromanagement

**R**ejection for perceived lack of status

**S**elective bias, discrimination



autonomy. We can override this when we recognise that our importance, our clarity and our relationships can all increase in teams – as well as the most important organisational objective: the innovation that only comes from the diversity of thought processes that you get from teams.

There is, indeed, a Wisdom of Crowds, as James Surowiecki writes in his book (*Surowiecki 2004*). Leaders need to set the boundaries and objectives in order to provide certainty, but then they need to trust their employees to deliver with autonomy. Allow employees to set their own ways of working, their own hours, their own workflow, and you will be amazed at the results that you get as a result of this trust. Control them like children and you will get their amygdala-driven survival instinct kicking in immediately.

**R=Rejection for perceived lack of status**

Vs.

**V= Valued talents**

Perceived status can be one of the most significant stressors we face. It is known to be one of the most influential determinants of human longevity and health. Our status is triggered all day long in the little conversations where someone might give us advice or suggest that our work could be improved. It flares when we are asked questions such as "Can I give you some feedback?"

Status symbols such as titles, office sizes, having a secretary, or having a parking space also trigger status questions. Now, imagine what happens to perceived status when an imminent job loss is present. For many of us, our job defines our status in life, which makes it a life or death situation in the current market. Leaders can combat this stressor by concentrating on watching status issues arise and quelling the issues before the noise in their people's minds gets too loud.

The need to concentrate on giving positive feedback: catching their employees in the act of doing something right. Negative feedback only draws attention to circuits in people's minds that are not working and puts them into an even more survival mindset. Our people can't do anything with negative feedback, either; old habitual brain circuits don't disappear with more attention, particularly if it's threatening attention. It's like telling someone not to think of a pink elephant. Leaders can also reduce the competition that causes status games by getting their employees to reflect on how they each can better their own game rather than engage in one-upmanship.



**S=Selective bias, discrimination**

**Vs.**

**E=Equity of comparable inputs and outcomes**

Lieberman has also shown that receiving 50 cents generated more of a reward response in the brain when it was out of a shared dollar between two people than getting \$10, when it was out of a shared \$50 between two people. (Lieberman 2007).

Leaders need to watch the "rules" they set for some people over others such as the headcount decisions that may impair one division over others or the values that they talk about but then don't hold themselves accountable to displaying. Setting ground rules and sticking to them quiets our mind around fairness issues and lets us get on with our work. Not surprising, pay discrepancies cause enormous tensions around fairness. CEO compensation has increased by more than 930% since 1978 with the top 1% earning 87 times more than the bottom 50% of workers in 2016, up from a 27-to-1 ratio in 1980. The CEOs at the top 350 companies make \$15.6 million on average, which is 271 times the wage of an average workers (Fortune 20 July 2017).

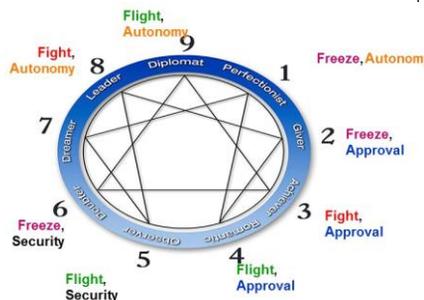
**2. Know how you respond automatically**

One of the most important parts of leadership is to know what triggers us into the amygdala hijack – understanding our own patterns of fighting, fleeing and/or freezing. Australian executive leadership expert Peter Burow has worked over the last 20 years to integrate neuroscience, philosophy, and psychology to develop an elegant model of the different "types" of survival responses, which he calls "Core Beliefs." (Burow, 2008). In his definition, core beliefs are deep-seated subconscious perceptions that we all have about the world in which we live, work and play.

Biologically, our Core Beliefs are there to help us in times of crisis, prompting instant decision-making and instant action when every second counts. Using them all the time, however, leads to burnout, stress, sickness and the feeling of being on constant alert. The adrenalin rush can be empowering for a day or so, but given that the "VUCA" world is here to stay for a while, we are at risk of our minds and emotions beginning to run dry. Organisations and teams that are run by their survival patterns are stressed, tired, tactical and uncreative. Chemically, people feel unsupported and in a battle for their life. Peter then talks about catching ourselves in our own Core Beliefs, and he identifies nine patterns of behaviour in response to crisis. Underneath each of these nine is a basic belief about what we need in life for survival and satisfaction. When these beliefs are contradicted, especially in emotional times, the amygdala

signals for some of us to become aggressive, some of us to withdraw, and some of us to put our heads down and do the job to the letter of the law. These are essentially fight, flight or freeze. We also respond emotionally from one of a possibility of three different needs: (i) acting out of approval from the need for attention (heart), (ii) acting out of anger from the need for autonomy (body), or (iii) acting out of fear/need for security (head). When three types of responses and three types of needs are combined, the result is a possibility of nine patterns of core beliefs. Each of us has one predominant core belief we rely upon when we are triggered.

These nine core beliefs are useful, as they form the patterns of what we will do in response to a hostile environment, particularly when we need to act in the immediate term. They are not useful when we pay attention to them to the extreme over our rational response. We shouldn't just simply neglect core beliefs. The emotional energy created by our core beliefs can be used to get over our tendency to fight, withdraw, or comply. We can also use it to become incredibly powerful leaders once integration of emotion and rationality has taken place. You can find more information about these nine types of Core Beliefs from the EnneagramInstitute.com



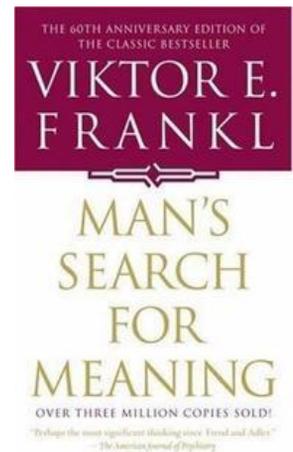
**3. Choose rationally instead: D.R.I.V.E. a trusting and safe culture**

The third part of the model lies in realising that we indeed do have choice. We do not have to retreat automatically back into our Core Beliefs. Viktor Frankl, a surviving Jewish psychiatrist of the Holocaust concentration camps, taught us about this eloquently:

**"Everything can be taken from a man or a woman but one thing: the last of human freedoms to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way, to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement."** (Frankl 1945)

Neuroscientists argue that we can make this choice consciously, but that we have limited time after a stressor to do so. When confronted with a "perceived" threat to survival, the brain takes about 0.3 seconds to register it as a desire to fight, fly or freeze. It then has the following 0.2 seconds of "veto power" to decide consciously to create a new perception or a new story about the situation. (Schwartz, 2008). Neuroscientists call this "reappraisal." Asking yourself whether it is really a life or death situation is the first step. This helps our brain label the situation as simply stress. Changing the story away from a stress story into an opportunity story is then a "reappraisal."

Reappraising or telling our brains another story of what it is perceiving is far more effective in terms of longevity and overall health outcomes than simply suppressing our anger or fear. (Oschner, 2008). The latter strategy simply forestalls the onset of disease, such as a bout with cancer or a heart attack. With suppression, there are still signals to release cortisol and adrenaline, which both signal our body to move nutrients to the extremities and away from our immune system, heart, and digestive systems. Suppression also decreases our memory functioning. Even if we attempt to distract ourselves away from the stress temporarily without reappraising the situation, the physical stress signals still return eventually. That's not the end of the story. Our people feel the stress as well. The research shows that our people know when we are simply suppressing as opposed to reappraising the situation. Their bodies feel our stress in their own blood pressure, heart rate, and immune system functions, whether we express our suppression "out loud" or not. Reappraising the situation through an optimistic lens is not as Pollyannish as it sounds.





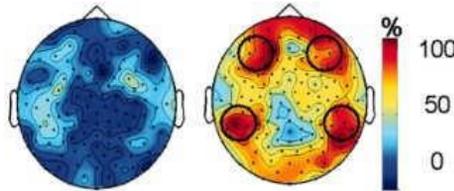
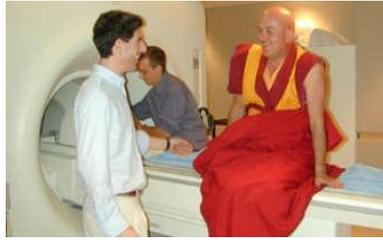
Renowned psychologist Martin Seligman has crunched millions of statistics to prove that optimistic organisations, sporting teams, and leaders succeed far more than their pessimistic counterparts. (*Seligman, 1990*). When pessimistic people run into obstacles in the workplace, in relationships, or in sports, they give up," he says. "When optimistic people encounter obstacles, they try harder. They go the extra mile." Seligman's research shows that businesses with the most optimistic environments also have the highest profit and customer satisfaction.

Neuroscientists can see optimism and pessimism at work in the brain through the functional MRI. When people are experiencing optimism, a part of the brain called the rostral anterior cingulate cortex, RACC, is activated, and it in turn moderates the fear response through the amygdala. Thanks to the RACC, our past may already be written, but our future is a blank slate where we can happily distance ourselves from negative experiences and move towards positive ones. (*Sharot et al, 2007*). Pessimism, on the other hand, monopolises the prefrontal cortex to focus on oneself and one's emotions to the exclusion of others and the external environment, inhibits motivation and inhibits our ability to make decisions.

#### 4. Cultivate mind fitness

The fourth part of the model lies in the fact that we can keep our mind and body fit in preparation for any stress, so that there is more chance for us to make conscious choice to reappraise the situation. If current trends continue, mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression, are predicted to be the single major burden of disease within the next two decades, and will certainly rise significantly in this recession atmosphere.

By 2030, it is predicted that depression will easily surpass the burden of heart disease. (*Hassed, 2008*). One way to keep our mind fit is through developing a practice of "mindfulness." The term mindfulness is being referred to more and more in leadership studies now. It is a term that was translated more than 100 years ago from the Pali word "sati" by the British scholar T.W. Rhys Davids. (*Rhys, 1880*). Psychologist William James (*James 1961*) was describing it when he wrote that: the faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgment, character and will. No one is compos sui [master of himself] if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence. But it is easier



The colour "brain histograms" above shows the percentage of subjects who showed a significant increase in gamma activity during meditation as measured by EEG located at various places on the scalp. The left brain is the histogram of 10 control subjects who underwent meditation training for one week before the experiment. The right brain is the histogram of 8 long-term Buddhist practitioners (ranging from 10,000 to 50,000 hours of meditation). (*Lutz 2004*) Much of this type of research has been done with Dr. Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin and Buddhist monk and world-renown author and speaker, Matthieu Ricard, shown in the photos above (Professor Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin).

to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about.

Mindfulness, simply defined, is nonjudgmental awareness and acceptance of the present. The mental process of mindfulness requires paying attention and self regulation. Research is showing that long-term meditators are able to coordinate significantly more parts of their brain than non-meditators; they are able to take in more incoming data, able to make more conscious choices about their behaviour, and able to improve their mental abilities significantly. (*Tang 2008*).

Even people that experienced meditation for the first time for just five days of training for twenty minutes per day showed higher abilities around attention. This means that they could select goal-relevant information and distinguish it from all the environmental noise. They also experienced less hostility, depression, fatigue, and tension and experienced a significant decrease in stress-related cortisol. They also experienced an increase in immunoreactivity. The interesting reflection is that we actually all meditate. Many of us, however, meditate on resentment, anger, guilt about the past and anxiety about the future. Medicine is showing us beyond all doubt that this type of "guilt and anxiety rumination" meditation leads to increased inflammation, impaired immunity, hardening of the arteries, increase of type 2 diabetes, and an atrophying of nerve cells in the brain which are targeted by stress hormones. (*Hassed, 2008; Tang, 2008*). The specific places in the brain that appear to be affected most are areas that are important in learning, memory, decision making, reasoning, impulse control and emotional regulation.

Stress and depression are risk factors for chronic illness, poor performance, cognitive decline and dementia. Mindfulness training helps us work with our attention to more healthy thoughts which literally impact us the in the moment we are having them. Mindfulness practice results in critical differences in brain function and combats many of the effects of ageing. It also prevents the classic "executive burnout" that we are seeing more and more often. This is associated with depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, lack of motivation and little personal accomplishment. Anxiety leads to smaller working memory spans.

Mindfulness practice reduces this anxiety, allowing us to increase IQ and treat the new health crisis facing our



executives: "attention deficit trait."

"ADT" has now been coined (*Hallowell, 2005*) as our tendency to multi-task, to not pay attention to anything very well, and to lose enjoyment of what we are doing. ADT-affected people find it difficult to prioritise, stay organised and manage time; they adopt very black-and-white thinking, and they will definitely not be the ones to take us down the road less travelled by. Mindfulness therapies now abound and are teaching us that we don't have to control our thoughts, but that we don't have to be controlled by them, either. We can just observe them and let them go by without consequence. The added benefit to mindfulness training is a greater ability for our minds to use intuition and insight. Intuition is the faint presence of a widespread unconscious that we know the answer somewhere in our mind (and for some of us, our gut). Insight is the "aha" moment that follows when we actually break through difficult problems.

Neuroscientists have observed the moment of insight as it occurs. (*Jung-Beeman, 2008*). In the prior moment before the brain experiences the insight (seen as a very high-frequency "gamma" wave of activity), the brain experiences a very low-frequency "alpha" wave of quiet (a mindful state). This isn't surprising. Anyone can tell you that they often solve problems best after sleep or after a shower or a run. At these times, the brain is in prime condition to experience the "aha" surge that must be preceded by the quieting. Besides the required mindful state necessary, scientists are also showing that people who are in better moods are much more able to solve problems with insight. Even watching comedy films helps people solve problems more effectively. Teams that laugh together will solve problems more quickly and more insightfully. Mindfulness about the problem itself also promotes a faster "aha" moment. This means asking about the problem: "How long has this been a problem? How often does this enter your thinking?"

In a parallel world to the business world but one from which we can learn, Dr. Craig Hassed, Senior Lecturer at Monash University's medical school, (*Hassed, 2008*) has become an ardent teacher of mindfulness to all of his medical students. He is seeing the same burnout in interns and residents as we are seeing in our executives. An Australian study found that eight months into their intern year, 75% of interns qualified as having burnout, characterised by depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, lack of motivation and little personal accomplishment. Another study of American hospital paediatric residents found that depressed doctors were six times more likely to make drug prescribing errors than their

non-depressed colleagues.

Craig teaches mindfulness to all the medical school students and has seen significant improvements across all kinds of physiological and psychological reactions. He calls his program ESSENCE, which stands for the combination of education, stress management, spirituality, exercise, nutrition, connectedness, and environment. All executives should be aware about the profound implications of integrating these seven elements into the business workplace and into the lives of our employees in order to gain their best performance. One needn't be new age to talk about spirituality. For most of us, spirituality can be more inclusively called our search for meaning, and we all yearn for that, as Nietzsche

so elegantly argued, **"He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how."**

**E**ducation  
**S**tress management  
**S**pirituality  
**E**xercise  
**N**utrition  
**C**onnectedness  
**E**nvironment

## Building your own trustworthiness

Although I like Maister's Trust equation a lot, leave it to Ken Blanchard (*Blanchard 2013*) to make it the self-assessment of trustworthiness even more simple. He actually has a self-assessment of trustworthiness available online free that looks at the "A,B,C and D" elements of whether you can consider yourself as trustworthy. If you would like to quiz yourself, go to his website [www.kenblanchard.com](http://www.kenblanchard.com) and look under Products & Services where you will find Building Trust, [TrustWorks Book Quiz](#).

Essentially, Ken and his colleagues looked at:

### A- Able

When you demonstrate competence and skills, you are Able, which builds trust. This is equivalent to Maister's credibility. Here you are expected to:

- Get quality results
- Solve problems
- Be highly skilled
- Be good at what you do
- Have relevant experience
- Use your skills to assist others
- Strive to be the best at what you do

### B- Believable

When you act with integrity, you are believable. Here, you are expected to:

- Keep confidences
- Admit when you are wrong
- Be honest
- Avoid talking behind people's backs
- Be sincere
- Be non judgmental
- Show respect for others

### C- Connected

When you care about others, you are connected, which builds trust. This is the equivalent of Maister's "intimacy. Here, you are expected to:

- Listen well
- Praise others' efforts
- Show interest in others
- Share about myself
- Work well with others
- Show empathy for others
- Ask for input

### D- Dependable

When you maintain reliability, you are dependable, which is again Maister's version of reliability as well. Here you are expected to:

- Do what you way you will
- Be timely
- Be responsive to requests
- Be organised
- Be accountable for your actions
- Follow up
- Be consistent

If you were to rate each behaviour as

H= Hardly ever

S= Sometimes

O= Often

V=Very often

A=Always

And then gave

H=1, S=2, O=3, V=4 and A=5 scores

For each of the A, B, C, and D qualities, 33-35 would be an outstanding score for the quality

30-32 would be good

27-29 would be average

Below 27 would be a Pay attention!



## Implications and Summary: What leaders need to do and even more important, who they need to be

To keep in mind above all is Viktor Frankl's advice that we will always have the freedom to choose our attitude to any circumstance. Tell your mind to "remind" your brain constantly that this choice exists, even if it only does have 0.2 seconds to do so. Think about the four steps to seeing the world in a different way:

1. Become aware of the hardwiring our brain has inherited from our Stone Age ancestors, which is reflected in our tendency to see False Evidence Appearing Real when we are exposed to a perceived "F.E.A.R.S." in the workplace. Constantly be vigilant against these conditions because they are not really sabre toothed tigers.
2. Educate yourself about how you and your people specifically respond to various stresses, catching yourselves in the act of fighting, fleeing, or freezing.
3. Practice reappraising situations and find ways to develop optimism. This can definitely be learned and wired into your brain's circuits. Your people will take your cue; optimism is contagious. You can also help them to reappraise situations, instead of simply ignoring stress, suppressing fear and keeping their head down. This is the last thing you need for your organisation and the last thing your employees need for their own physical health.
4. Keep your mind and body fit through practising various versions of mindfulness. There are hundreds of ways to develop mindfulness – from meditation to sport to gardening to simply being quiet and watching your thoughts as you ride the bus into town. Develop methods for your employees to find quiet time in their day so that they can be inspired by intuition and insight. Encourage their senses of humour, which will support the optimism and actually inspire the insight even

## Leadership is conscious choice

At the end of the day, leadership is truly synonymous with conscious intent. The art of being aware of your brain's machinations and how you can control these machinations with your mind is quintessential in the art of leadership. "It is the brain that puts out the call, but it is the mind that decides what to listen to," as neuroscientist Jeffrey Schwartz argues. "We have no control over the messages the brain sends you—we only have veto power about what we act on." (Schwartz, 2008). Perhaps we can draw comfort from one of the greatest leaders in times of difficulty, Winston Churchill, who reminds us from the past that

**"an optimist sees an opportunity in every calamity; a pessimist sees a calamity in every opportunity."**

***Which road will you choose to travel by?***

**I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and  
I --  
I took the one less travelled by,  
and that has made all the  
difference.**

**-Robert Frost, 1915**

## Two stories about positive feedback

### *Pygmalion in the Classroom*

Although not ethical in this day and age, in 1963, American psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1992) showed us the power of both positive feedback as well as the mindset of a teacher/leader. They chose a primary school to work with and tested all the students at the school with an IQ test at the beginning of the year. They then informed the teachers who their "top 10" students were based on the IQ test. After the year was over, they measured the IQ's of the children again. Not surprisingly, the IQ increases for the "top 10" had been much higher than those for the rest of the class, particularly for year 1 (28 point increase vs. 12).

The twist was that the experimenters had actually randomly chosen the "top 10" students at the beginning. The conclusion was that the teachers had created the conditions by which the randomly selected students were "observed into the reality of talent" – showing the power of positive feedback and the mindset of a leader.

### *Teaching Tennis*

Tim Gallwey, author of the *Inner Game of Tennis* and many other similar books, talks about how he can teach anyone to play tennis in 20 minutes. (Gallwey, 1974). He gets them on the court and simply swinging the racquet as they feel it should be swung. For every swing, he tells them technically what they did right: their eye position, their hip balance, their foot stance, the angle of their elbow, etc. He never mentions once what they are doing wrong (it's like telling someone not to think of a pink elephant). In 20 minutes, they are playing smoothly, with brain circuits already starting to form around the game of tennis.



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### About the author

Katharine McLennan's combined career spans corporate strategy, operations, talent/leadership development and self transformation. Her most recent corporate roles have included Senior Vice President of People & Culture at Cochlear, Head of the QBE Global Leadership Academy and Executive General Manager, Talent and Business Unit HR for Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

Katharine is now an executive coach and psychotherapist for a range of corporate, government and non-profit leaders of organisations, where she focuses on corporate strategy, talent and psychology. She also works individual facing depression, anxiety, addiction, trauma, and career transition.

Prior to her corporate career, Katharine spent 10 years in leadership consulting, providing advisory services on behalf of three major organisations: Heidrick & Struggles, the Mettle Group and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Before becoming the passionate leadership developer, Katharine's execution and pragmatic sense was fully developed in her role as head of operational planning and execution of the Sydney Olympic Games between 1996 and 2000, as well as her experience in the non-profit sector with her work with the YWCA NSW. In this role she led the operational planning process for the venue operations and was the main facilitator on all operational planning and contingency exercises within the Sydney organisation. She continues today to advise the IOC and all Organising Committees in their operational planning, workforce strategies and leadership development.

Her corporate strategy background is grounded in her formative years with Booz & Co driving corporate growth strategies, business reconstruction and process re-engineering across industries such as health care, banking, telecommunications and logistics. Clients included CBA, NAB, Tubemakers, TNT, Telstra, Royal Adelaide Hospital, the Alfred Hospital and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Katharine has degrees with top honours in Biology/Neuroscience and History (Duke), Business (MBA, Stanford), and Political Science (MA, UNSW).

Katharine is a qualified psychotherapist ([PACFA](#)), and an Industry Professor of the University of Technology Sydney. She is also a Director of Petrea King's [Quest for Life](#).

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