Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long

Featuring David Rock,
Author of Your Brain at Work: Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long
Dear Participant:

Welcome to the Linkage broadcast, Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long. This broadcast from Linkage’s Thought Leader Series features David Rock, Founder and CEO of the NeuroLeadership Group, a global consulting and training firm with operations in 24 countries. One of the foremost thought leaders in the global coaching profession and author of Your Brain at Work, Mr. Rock explores the emerging science of the brain and how “knowing about the brain can help you create an organizational structure that inspires your employees to take pride in their work, bring more attention and resourcefulness to their tasks, and work more collaboratively with their peers.” Mr. Rock will give you the tools to be more productive in everything you do through giving you a greater insight into what’s happening in yours and other people’s brains.

David Rock interviewed 30 leading neuroscientists and accessed over 300 brain and psychological studies for Your Brain at Work, a fascinating and important work that integrates neuroscience findings into the business world. Responsible for coining the term “NeuroLeadership” — a global initiative bringing neuroscientists and leadership experts together to build a new science for leadership development — Mr. Rock translates his findings into strategies that organizations like Accenture, Ericsson, and NASA implement to develop leaders, retain talent, improve performance, and change culture.

Expectations are high in today’s organizations. Every day involves a constant and massive amount of work — at times seemingly overwhelming. Our personal expectations are high as well. We think that we should successfully complete everything on our plates. We demand personal excellence. The work is complex, involving significant decision making and problem solving skills. When we struggle to get it all done — and done correctly — we think it must be the way we are working. Maybe our time management skills need work. Maybe we should attend a class on decision making techniques. As David Rock will teach you, the truth is your brain has biological limits. “No matter how much effort you put in, you can’t sit there and make brilliant decisions all day.”

Through his extensive research Mr. Rock has delved into the most recent and important discoveries about the human brain — discoveries that point to the critical need to understand your brain at work. This new knowledge will open up a new world for business leaders, one that allows you to be more focused and productive, no easy feat in today’s overwhelming work environment. Imagine being able to solve problems quicker, stay cool under pressure, drive change and collaboration among your peers and employees, and influence others more effectively. The possibilities are endless when you know how to maximize the most amazing tool you have at your disposal — your brain.
In this presentation, you will learn:

- How to improve productivity through understanding what’s happening in your brain.
- How to prioritize more effectively to get more done.
- The secrets to making solving problems easier.
- Strategies to keep your cool when the pressure’s on.
- The five things you need to know about getting the most from others.

These participant materials have been designed to complement your participation in this broadcast with David Rock. Use the materials before the broadcast to set the stage for the broadcast. Learn more about Mr. Rock and how the brain affects how, why, and what we do.

Use the materials during David Rock’s presentation to take notes on important concepts. Mr. Rock will use the 90 minutes to provide some prepared material about the neuroscience of leadership, and how you can use your newfound knowledge of the brain to work smarter all day long.

Most importantly, use the materials after the broadcast to help reflect on ways to embrace the principles and implement the tools and techniques Mr. Rock outlines in his presentation on Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long. Make the most of the wonderful, quirky nature of your brain to improve performance and achieve success.
About Linkage

Linkage, Inc. is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. Serving the public and private sectors, the company provides clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized onsite training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research.

With a relentless commitment to learning, Linkage also offers a full range of conferences, institutes, summits, public workshops, and distance learning programs on leading-edge topics in leadership, management, HR, and OD. More than 100,000 leaders and managers have attended a Linkage program since the company’s founding in 1988.

Headquartered in Burlington, Massachusetts, Linkage has offices in Atlanta, New York, and San Francisco, with operations in Athens, Bangalore, Brussels, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Johannesburg, Kuala Lumpur, Kuwait City, Mexico City, Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore, and Sydney. On two occasions, Linkage has been named to the Inc. 500, a list of the fastest-growing private companies in the United States.

Other Linkage Programs

Linkage’s broadcasts represent the best in leadership and management thinking, providing you with:

- Idea-generating programs by world-renowned and inspirational leaders.
- A convenient, on-site option for educating your leaders and managers.
- An innovative vehicle to deliver and drive the learning.

Check Linkage’s website (http://www.linkageinc.com) for additional programming, details, and updates. Linkage’s featured speakers are available On-Demand via Web cast or DVD:

- Bill Conaty on Why Smart People Put People Before Numbers
- Steven Johnson on Where Good Ideas Come From
- Charlene Li on Open Leadership: Transform the Way you Lead
- Atul Gawande on How to Get Things Right in a Complex World
- Adrian Gostick on How One Great Team Can Transform an Entire Organization
- Michael Roberto on How Great Leaders Prevent Problems Before They Happen
- Carlos Gutierrez on Leadership from Top to Bottom
- Marshall Goldsmith on The Positive Actions Leaders Must Take to Start Winning Again
- Dan Heath on How to Change when Change is Hard
- Malcolm Gladwell on Why People are Successful
• Sheena Iyengar on *The Art of Choosing*
• Hank Haney on *A Roadmap to Excellence*
• Lynda Gratton on *Creating Performance Driven Innovation within your Organization*
• Les McKeown on *Get Your Organization on the Growth Track*
• Rosabeth Moss Kanter on *Leading a SuperCorp*
• David Cooperrider on *A Symphony of Strengths*
• Richard Boyatzis on *Leading in a New World*
• Sandra Taylor on *The Business Case of Corporate Social Responsibility*
• John Maxwell on *The Five Levels of Leadership*
• Stephen M. R. Covey on *Leading at the Speed of Trust*
• Randy Street on *Using the A Method to Evaluate Talent*
• Peter Sheahan on *Future Proof: How to be Up in a Down Market*
• Marilyn Carlson Nelson on *How We Lead Matters*
• Tom Peters on *Creating the 21st Century Organization*
• Michael Treacy on *Sustaining Double-Digit Growth in Any Economy*
• Doris Kearns Goodwin on *Team of Rivals*
• John Kotter on *Leading Change*
• Marshall Goldsmith on *Coaching for Leadership*
• Patrick Lencioni on *Building and Leading a High Performance Team*
• Keith Ferrazzi on *Relationships for Group Success*
• Warren Bennis on *The Most Common (and Often Fatal) Failures of Top Leadership*
• C.K. Prahalad on *Making Strategy Work: The Future of Value Creation*
• Ann Richards on *Successful Leadership*
• Michael Useem on *Reaching the Go Point*
• Clayton Christensen on *Building a Successful Innovation-Driven Organization*
• Benazir Bhutto on *Diversity*
• David Breashears on *Vision, Courage, and Passion: Leadership at 26,000 Feet*
• Tom Davenport on *Maximizing Knowledge Worker Productivity: The Next Generation of Management*
• Tony Schwartz on *Building Individual and Organizational Capacity in the Age of Overload*
• Phil Harkins on *Powerful Conversations*
• Mareen and Kimball Fisher on *Leading High Performance Virtual Teams*
• Nick Washienko on *Effective Leadership Communication*
• Noel Tichy on Judgment: How Winning Leaders Make Great Calls
• Quint Studer on Transforming a Corporate Culture to Drive Sustainable Results
• Marilyn King on Envisioning the Gold: An Olympian’s Challenge to Business Leaders
• Betsy Myers on Authentic Leadership: How You Can Take the Lead
• Marilyn Tam on How to Use What You’ve Got to Get What You Want
• Michael Lee Stallard and Jason Pankau on Fired Up Leadership to Boost Productivity and Innovation
• Gail Evans on The Power of Working Women Working Together
• Pat Mitchell on Leader as Mentor
• Jack & Suzy Welch on Producing Results: Winning Through Flawless Execution
• Rick Belluzzo & Jay Conger on Developing Your Leadership Bench Strength
• Mike Krzyzewski & Catherine McCarthy on Coaching to Win: Developing People and Teams Who Excel
• Michael Porter on Creating a Vision for Competitive Advantage
• Phil Harkins & Dave Liniger on Everybody Wins: Proven and Repeatable Guidelines for Creating Unprecedented Growth
• Malcolm Gladwell on The Power of Rapid Cognition for Business Leaders
• Dave Ulrich on Creating Your Own Leadership Brand
• Dan Goleman on Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: Bottom Line Results
• Cokie Roberts on Lessons in Leadership: From the Halls of Congress to Our Founding Mothers
• Bill George on Authentic Leadership: Recovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value
• Sherron Watkins & Joseph Badaracco Jr. on Ethics in Leadership
• Richard Branson on Lessons in Leadership
• Rudi Giuliani on Leading in Difficult Times
• Michael Hammer on Managing Without Structure

Future Broadcasts

• November 17: Jason Jennings on Reinvention
• December 8: Paul Sullivan on Why Some People Excel Under Pressure and Some Don’t
• March 13, 2012: Douglas Conant
• April 18, 2012: Stephen Shapiro
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ON YOUR MARK

PRE-BROADCAST PREPARATION
Introduction and Basic Premise

“Leadership belongs to the most aware.”

– Kevin Cashman

The excerpt that follows is from Your Brain at Work and is reprinted with permission from the author, David Rock.

They say awareness is the first step to self-improvement. Self-awareness is the path to understanding your behavior and actions. When you understand yourself, you can make the necessary changes to achieve success. But sometimes, even when we are self-aware, we still can’t explain why we make a bad decision or why we are unable to collaborate effectively with another person. We let our emotions take control and hijack our brain. It’s time to take self-awareness to a more elemental, yet complex, level. It’s time to enhance your understanding of your brain.

Toward or Away

Dr. Evian Gordon is the founder of the Brain Resource Company, which has developed the world’s largest brain database. Gordon has an intriguing vantage point as someone who can see patterns among a wide range of research. One of the central insights he has had in the last decade, which he and Lea Williams put forward in their INTEGRATE model, is that the brain has an overarching organizing principle, which is to classify the world around you into things that will either hurt you or help you stay alive. “Everything you do in life is based on your brain’s determination to minimize danger or maximize reward,” Gordon explains. “‘Minimize danger, maximize reward’ is the organizing principle of the brain.”

The limbic system scans data streaming into the brain, telling you what to pay more attention to, and in what way. It’s the limbic system’s job to tell you whether some red berries on a bush are dangerous or tasty. Emotions such as curiosity, happiness, and contentment are toward responses. Anxiety, sadness, and fear, on the other hand, are away responses.

When the brain detects a threat that could endanger your life it is called a primary threat. Primary threats include real threats such as seeing a bear in the woods or getting hungry, hot, or thirsty, or even just seeing angry faces in a photograph. When your brain detects something that could help you survive, you experience a sense of reward, from noticing what are called primary rewards. Primary rewards include food, money, and sex, or even just a familiar face.

The limbic system is constantly making toward or away decisions. These decisions happen automatically, about half a second before you are consciously aware of them if you become aware of them at all. One study found that the brain does this even with nonsense words, which get classified as either positive or negative based on whether the phonemes, or sound units of the words, are perceived as pleasant or unpleasant.

As you experience emotions, your limbic system automatically becomes aroused. Many brain regions are part of this process, but the two most interesting ones are the hippocampus and the amygdala. The hippocampus is a large brain region involved in declarative memory, meaning memory that can be consciously experienced. Such memories are made up of billions of complex
networks of neural maps, spread across the brain. The hippocampus is in charge of organizing and indexing these maps. Your hippocampus doesn’t just remember facts; it also remembers feelings about facts. The stronger you feel about something, the easier it is to recall (with the exception of some events with intense emotions that are not remembered for more complex reasons). If you can remember far back enough to recall a mental picture of a favorite high-school teacher, you will also remember how you felt about her. The feeling arises at the moment the memory appears; it’s all part of the same network.

The hippocampus is an important part of the network that remembers whether something is a danger or a reward, linking new experiences to previous memories.

The amygdale is an almond-shaped region that sits just above the area responsible for smell. Although the amygdale is often thought of as the “emotional center” of the brain, it is just one part of the limbic system network. It works with the hippocampus and other limbic regions. The amygdale does have an interesting quirk that has helped make it famous: it tends to become aroused in proportion to the strength of an emotional response. It’s like the brain’s thermometer for feelings. And you can see this arousal clearly in fMRI studies. Arousal can be driven either toward or away emotions, through, as you will see, these two types of emotions arouse the limbic system in different ways.

**Issues, Hot Buttons, Gremlins, Hot Spots, Demons**

The limbic system gets aroused in a wide range of situations…Everyone has a unique set of “hot buttons” that can trigger limbic system arousal. These triggers have been discussed by psychologists and philosophers for centuries and go by many names, including the unconscious, patterns, gremlins, demons, and issues, but I’m going to call them **hot spots**. Hot spots are patterns of experience stored in your limbic system and tagged as dangerous. When the original pattern that produced the hot spot (or something similar) reappears, the danger response kicks in, proportional to the degree of danger tagged to the situation.

When overly aroused by real or imagined dangers (or the rarer strong rewards), the limbic system impairs your brain functioning in a number of significant ways. This reduced functioning often occurs without conscious awareness, and can even generate false confidence. For example, increased adrenaline when you experience fear might make you feel focused and therefore more confident in your decisions, when you ability to make the best decisions has actually been reduced.

**Time is of the Essence**

James Gross, associate professor of psychology at Stanford University, is at the forefront in the field of emotional regulation. Gross developed a model of emotions that distinguishes what happens both before an emotion arises and once it is present. He explains that before an emotion arises, there are several choices to be made: **situation selection**, **situation modification**, and **attention deployment**.

If [you know you are terrible] at pitching to customers, [you might choose] not to pitch anymore. That’s situation selection at work. Once you’re in a situation, you can modify it to some degree.
That’s situation modification. [You could choose] to do a sales pitch, but made sure [you are] thoroughly prepared. Even when you are already in a situation, you can still decide where to put your attention. That’s attention deployment. [You] might decided to do the pitch, and be prepared for it, but still [feel] anxious, and [choose] not to pay attention to this anxiety. This approach is similar to the way you manage distraction, the veto power I introduce earlier in the book.

These options work only before emotions kick in. Once emotions kick in, you have only three options. The first option is to express your emotions. If you’re upset, cry, as kids do. Obviously, in many social and work settings, this doesn’t work too well.

The second option is expressive suppression, which requires holding the feeling down and stopping the emotions from being perceived by others.

The third strategy involves cognitive change. “Even after you’ve got yourself into a bad situation, you can still, even at this relatively late stage, think about it differently,” Gross explains. There are two examples of this phenomenon. One is called labeling. It’s when you take a situation and put a label on your emotions. The other is called reappraisal, which involves changing your interpretation of an event.

Gross set up lab experiments where people would watch emotion-inducing videos of scenes I won’t bring to your mind right now. He would then get them to try different emotion-regulation techniques and evaluate the effects on the participants’ emotional state, both by self-rated measures and by measuring bodily changes such as cortisol level and blood pressure. There are several surprising and important findings to this work. Gross found that people who tried to suppress a negative emotional experience failed to do so. While they thought they looked fine outwardly, inwardly their limbic system was just as aroused as without suppression, and in some cases, even more aroused. Kevin Ochsner, at Columbia, repeated these findings using an fMRI. Trying not to feel something doesn’t work, and in some cases even backfires.

There’s more. Gross found that when people try to suppress the expression of an emotion, their memory of events is impaired, as if they are consciously focusing their attention elsewhere…Trying to suppress the expression of an emotion takes a lot of cognitive resources, which leaves fewer resources for paying attention to the moment.

Gross had an observer sit across from the participants while they tried different emotion-regulation approaches. He found that when someone suppressed the expression of a negative emotion, the observer’s blood pressure went up. The observer is expecting to see an emotion but gets nothing. This is odd, and in this way, suppression literally makes other people uncomfortable. “A bit like secondhand smoke, suppression has a real impact on others,” Gross explains.

So suppression has a lot of downsides, and expression is often out of the question. You can try to stay out of emotion-arousing events with situation selection, but that may lead to some downsides, such as not leaving the house much. The ability to veto where you focus your attention can help; however, there are times when you don’t have the mental resources to do this, which is once an emotion kicks in. Sometimes you need to do more to wrestle an emotion down. What’s needed is some form of cognitive change.
**Name That State**

When your limbic system becomes aroused, the resources available for your prefrontal cortex decrease. However, this works the other way, too. Increasing the arousal of the prefrontal cortex can dampen down the arousal of your limbic system. The two work like a seesaw. You can make this switch happen by trying to find the right word to identify an emotional sensation, a technique that is called *symbolic labeling*.

A study of labeling illustrates an intriguing quirk of human nature. Participants were asked to predict if they would feel better or worse if they spoke about their emotions. There was a strong tendency for people to expect that labeling emotions would result in increasing their emotional arousal. Surprisingly, people even predicted that labeling emotions would make the emotions worse, even after doing an experiment that illustrated that labeling their emotions decreased them! Because people incorrectly predict that voicing their feelings will make those feelings worse, a lot of people, especially in the business world, don’t discuss their feelings. This is an example of humans developing some unfortunate habits from incorrect assumptions about human nature. We shouldn’t be too hard on humanity, though. Plenty of studies show that speaking about emotional experience does bring the emotions back to the surface. The key is how you do it. To reduce arousal, you need to use just a few words to describe an emotion, and ideally use symbolic language, which means using indirect metaphors, metrics, and simplifications of your experience. This requires you to activate your prefrontal cortex, which reduces the arousal in the limbic system. Here’s the bottom line: describe an emotion in just a word or two, and it helps reduce the emotion. Open up a dialogue about an emotion, though, and you tend to increase it.

Being able to *stay cool under pressure* is a basic requirement for many jobs today. For people in leadership positions, this need is even more acute. Joan Fiore coaches senior executives at Microsoft. “I try to imagine what it’s like for these people to have to do what they do every day, and it just blows my mind,” Fiore says. Most successful executives have developed an ability to be in a state of high limbic system arousal and still remain calm. Partly this is their ability to label emotional states. They are like an advanced driver who has a word for the experience of fear when he senses his car going into a skid. During a skid he can recall the word instantly, therefore reducing his panic. Stress is not necessarily a bad thing. It’s how you deal with it that’s key. Successful people learn to harness deep stress and turn it into *eustress*, thus enhancing prefrontal cortex functioning…People who succeed under pressure have learned to be in a place of high arousal but maintain a quiet mind, so that they can still think clearly. Over time and with patience, this capacity can become an automatic resource. The brain can be wired to deal better with emotions.

**Every Dark Cloud Has a Sliver of Reappraisal**

Cognitive reappraisal (reappraisal, for short) is the other cognitive change strategy for regulating emotions. A series of studies shows that reappraisal generally has a strong emotional braking effect than labeling, thus it’s a tool for reducing the impact of bigger emotional hits.

Reappraisal often goes by other names, such as reframing or recontextualizing. There are all kinds of aphorisms for reappraisal, such as turning a sow’s ear into a silk purse or finding the
silver lining in a dark cloud. Kevin Ochsner, at Columbia University, studies the neuroscience of reappraisal, building in part on James Gross’s psychological research.

In one of Ochsner’s reappraisal experiments, participants are shown a photo of people crying outside a church, which naturally makes participants feel sad. They are then asked to imagine the scene is a wedding, that people are crying tears of joy. At the moment that participants change their appraisal of the event, their emotional response changes, and Ochsner is there to capture what is going on in their brains using an fMRI. As Ochsner explains, “Our emotional responses ultimately flow out of our appraisals of the world, and if we can shift those appraisals, we shift our emotional responses.” While most reappraisal tends to be toward being more upbeat, it’s also possible to reappraise negatively, to alter a perspective for the worse…Remember that perceived dangers pack a punch, so even a small reappraisal in the wrong direction can have quite an impact.

Ochsner’s research finds that as people reappraise positively, there is increased activation of the right and left ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, and a corresponding reduction in activation of the limbic system. This is similar to what Lieberman finds when people label emotions. It turns out that conscious control over the limbic system is possible, not by suppressing a feeling, but rather by changing the interpretation that creates the feeling in the first place. One difference between labeling and reappraisal, though, is that while people incorrectly predict that labeling will increase arousal, they correctly predict that reappraisal can reduce arousal.

A Reappraisal for All Seasons

From my own observations I believe there are four main types of reappraisal. The first type is what happens in the wedding/funeral picture experiment. You decide that a threatening event is no longer a threat. We do this type of reappraisal a lot, usually without knowing it. For example, when I am at an airport walking toward a gate I can’t see, I get anxious about missing my flight. Once the gate is in sight and I can see a queue of people, my anxiety drops. I have decided I am not in danger, and I immediately feel better. The first type of reappraisal involves reinterpreting an event.

The second type of reappraisal is at the heart of many effective management and therapeutic techniques. It goes by the name of normalizing, and it’s a widely useful tool. Let’s say you are in a brand-new job and don’t yet have mental maps for even simple things such as finding stationery or coffee. Everything is new. New means uncertain, which means arousing…Having an explanation for an experience reduced uncertainty and increases a perception of control. The field of change management builds on the power of normalizing, by describing the emotions and stages that occur during change, such as denial or anger, to help people reduce the threat response. When you normalize a situation, be it the stress of a new job or the challenges of bringing up teenagers, you are using a second type of reappraisal.

The third type of reappraisal is a little more complex, but essentially it involves reordering information. The brain keeps information in nested hierarchies. All information is positioned relative to other ideas. This is similar in a sense to how an organizational chart looks: every map in your brain is above some maps and below or alongside others…Reordering how you value the
world changes the hierarchical structure of how your brain stores information, which changes how your brain interacts with the world.

The last type of reappraisal is probably the hardest to do, but at times can be the most effective...One of the most common causes of tension between people is someone being fixed in his own worldview and not being able to see the world through another person’s eyes. When you take another person’s perspective, you are changing the context through which you view a situation...Think of this type of reappraisal as repositioning, as you are finding a new position from which to look at an event. It could be from another person’s position, or from another country or culture’s perspective, or even from a perspective of yourself at another time.

Each of these four types of reappraisal — reinterpreting, normalizing, reordering, and repositioning — are techniques people use all the time. With a deeper understanding of the biology behind reappraisal, and thus richer, easier-to-find maps for these techniques, you can begin to reappraise more often, and more quickly, which can significantly increase your ability to stay cool under pressure.

Reappraisal as the “Killer Application” for Emotional Regulation

Work involves complex, uncertain, messy tasks. Someone who could not regulate his emotions well would last about an hour in most jobs. Yet while most people have reasonable emotion-regulation capacities, they still operate under more arousal than is ideal for peak performance...A small amount of over-arousal can result in your taking longer to do simple work or missing important insights.

It doesn’t have to be this way. As you learn more about your brain, it becomes possible to stay calm in just about any situation, including the overwhelming limbic system arousal driven by uncertainty about the future. It’s reappraisal that gives you this capacity...To me, reappraisal is one of the most important skills needed for success in life.

Some Things to Try

- Be conscious of things that may increase limbic system arousal and work out ways to reduce these, before the arousal kicks in.
- Practicing noticing emotions as they arise, to get better at sensing their presence earlier.
- When you sense a strong emotion coming on, refocus your attention quickly on another stimulus before the emotion takes over.
- Practice assigning words to emotional states to reduce arousal once it kicks in.
- Practice reappraisal early when you feel a strong emotion coming on.
- You can reappraise by reinterpreting an event, or reordering your values, or normalizing an event, or repositioning your perspective.
- Reappraising you own experience is a powerful way of managing internal stressors; use this technique when you are anxious about your mental performance by saying “That’s just my brain.”
Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long

Pre-Broadcast Activity: The Healthy Mind Platter

The excerpt that follows is from The Healthy Mind Platter and is reprinted with permission from the author, David Rock. Published on June 2, 2011 by David Rock in Your Brain at Work and PsychologyToday.com.

The US government has just revised the food pyramid — the diagram that’s been with us for decades that is supposed to remind people how to eat well. The model needed a revision, and the new version, called ChooseMyPlate, is a big improvement.

However, there’s a different epidemic happening out there that’s getting less attention, perhaps because it is less obvious than the epidemic of obesity we’re experiencing. We’re entering an era of an epidemic of overwhelm. A time when too many people’s mental well-being is being stretched through multi-tasking, fragmented attention, and information overload.

The trouble is, we are short on simple, clear information about good mental habits. Few people know about what it takes to have optimum mental health, and the implications of being out of balance. It is not taught in schools, or discussed in business. The issue just isn’t on the table. The result is that we stretch ourselves in ways that may have even bigger implications than an unhealthy physical diet.

So, my friend and colleague Dr. Dan Siegel and I got together and decided to create what we’re calling the Healthy Mind Platter. This platter has seven essential mental activities necessary for optimum mental health in daily life. These seven daily activities make up the full set of ‘mental nutrients’ that you brain needs to function at its best. By engaging every day in each of these servings, you enable your brain to coordinate and balance its activities, which strengthens your brain’s internal connections and your connections with other people.

The seven essential daily mental activities are:

- **Focus Time.** When we closely focus on tasks in a goal-oriented way, taking on challenges that make deep connections in the brain.

- **Play Time.** When we allow ourselves to be spontaneous or creative, playfully enjoying novel experiences, which helps make new connections in the brain.

- **Connecting Time.** When we connect with other people, ideally in person, or take time to appreciate our connection to the natural world around us, richly activating the brain’s relational circuitry.

- **Physical Time.** When we move our bodies, aerobically if medically possible, which strengthens the brain in many ways.

- **Time In.** When we quietly reflect internally, focusing on sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts, helping to better integrate the brain.
• **Down Time.** When we are non-focused, without any specific goal, and let our mind wander or simply relax, which helps our brain recharge.

• **Sleep Time.** When we give the brain the rest it needs to consolidate learning and recover from the experiences of the day.

We’re not suggesting a specific recipe for a healthy mind, as each individual is different, and our needs change over time too. The point is to become aware of the full spectrum of essential mental activities, and just like with essential nutrients, make sure that at least every day we are nudging the right ingredients into our mental diet, even for just a little time. Just like you wouldn’t eat only pizza every day for days on end, we shouldn’t just live on focus time and little sleep. Mental wellness is all about giving your brain lots of opportunities to develop in different ways.

As you become aware of what the brain needs to function at its best, it is time to apply the concept of the *Healthy Mind Platter* to your everyday life. To maximize your mental capabilities at work, it’s critical to take a look at how you are balancing your seven daily mental activities. Using the space provided below, map out an average day and determine what percentage of your time is spent in each area. Like a balanced diet, there are many combinations that can work well, but to ensure optimal performance, it’s important to spend time in each area, every day.

What can you do to positively impact this area? Be specific.

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“Here’s a novel notion, grounded in science: Human beings aren’t meant to operate like computers; continuously, at high speeds, for long periods of time, running multiple programs at the same time.

The more hours we stayed plugged in, without real renewal, the more we begin to default reflexively into behaviors that reduce our effectiveness and take a pernicious toll on others: impatience, frustration, anxiety, and distraction.”

Tony Schwartz

Disconnect to Connect
Building Individual and Organizational Capacity in the Age of Overload
a Linkage Distance Learning Broadcast; available on demand.
### Daily % of time spent in each area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily % of time spent in each area</th>
<th>My Healthy Mind Platter Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Play Time:</strong> ____%</td>
<td><strong>Play Time:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- I am satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I am not satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area, and I will do the following to increase the time I spend on play time:</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="play_time_icon.png" alt="Play Time Icon" /></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connecting Time:</strong> ____%</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I am satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I am not satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area, and I will do the following to increase the time I spend on connecting time:</td>
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<td><img src="connecting_time_icon.png" alt="Connecting Time Icon" /></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Time:</strong> ____%</td>
<td><strong>Physical Time:</strong></td>
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<td>- I am satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I am not satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area, and I will do the following to increase the time I spend on physical time:</td>
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<td><img src="physical_time_icon.png" alt="Physical Time Icon" /></td>
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</table>
### Daily % of time spent in each area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily % of time spent in each area</th>
<th>My Healthy Mind Platter Plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time In Time: _____%</td>
<td>Time In Time:</td>
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<td>□ I am satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area.</td>
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<td>□ I am not satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area, and I will do the following to increase the time I spend on time in time:</td>
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<td>Down Time: _____%</td>
<td>Down Time:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>□ I am satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area.</td>
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<td>□ I am not satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area, and I will do the following to increase the time I spend on down time:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleep Time: _____%</td>
<td>Sleep Time:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>□ I am satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>□ I am not satisfied with the percentage of time I spend in this area, and I will do the following to increase the time I spend on sleep time:</td>
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</tbody>
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The Linkage Thought Leader Series 17
**Question Preparation for Q&A Session**

David Rock will devote the last portion of the broadcast to answer your questions. Complete the Question Sheet found on the next to last page of this participant guide and:

If you are participating in the live presentation of this program, you can submit your questions directly from your webcast viewing window. You can also submit your questions through e-mail using the instructions on the Question Sheet. Your program coordinator may collect your questions and send them in collectively.

Email to: leadership2011@linkageinc.com

If you are participating in a recorded presentation of this program, share your questions with your program coordinator to be used during your post-broadcast activities.

**Twitter**

Linkage will now be accepting questions through Twitter. To follow the conversation online or to submit your questions/comments during a live broadcast using Twitter, please use the hash tag #LinkageInc
GET SET

PRESENTATION
During the Presentation

- Participate! Listen actively — question concepts and “try them on” to see how they may apply to you and your situation.
- Take notes on the pages that follow. Capture key thoughts and ideas.
- Be bold! Identify one thing to do and vow to take action.
Distractions are everywhere. And with the always-on technologies of today, they take a heavy toll on productivity. One study found that office distractions eat up an average 2.1 hours a day. Another study, published in October 2005, found that employees spend an average of 11 minutes on a project before being distracted. After an interruption it takes them 25 minutes to return to the original task.

Once you understand how much energy is involved in high-level thinking such as planning and creating, you might be more vigilant about allowing distractions to steal your attention.

David Rock
Your Brain at Work
pg. 36 and 37

Notes

Please use the following pages to take notes.

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Researchers have known for one hundred years that there is a “sweet spot” for peak performance. In 1908, scientists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson discovered a fact about human performance that they called the inverted U. They found that performance was poor at low levels of stress, hit a sweet spot at reasonable levels of stress, and tapered off under high stress. The verb stress means “to emphasize,” and it’s not necessarily a negative thing. It’s wrong to think your performance would improve if stress disappeared from your life.

Positive stress helps focus your attention.

David Rock
Your Brain at Work
pg. 62
An impasse is a roadblock to a desired mental path. It's a connection you want to make but can't. While impasses are something we all experience regularly, they are especially relevant when you need to be creative. Being creative involves getting around impasses.

According to Professor Richard Florida, author of The Rise of the Creative Class, more than 50 percent of workers today do creative work. Creative people are all about putting together information in a novel way. Novelty gets attention. And in the business world, attention tends to generate revenue. In this way, the creative process is a big engine of wealth creation. These people hit a lot of impasses.
Dr. Stellan Ohlsson, at the University of Illinois at Chicago…explains how when facing a new problem, people apply strategies that worked in prior experiences. This works well if a new problem is similar to an old problem. However, in many situations this is not the case, and the solution from the past gets in the way, stopping better solutions from arising. The incorrect strategy becomes the source of the impasse.

Ohlsson’s research shows that people have to stop themselves from thinking along one path before they can find a new idea…The ability to stop oneself from thinking something is central to creativity.

David Rock
Your Brain at Work
pg. 77 and 78
And who needs to learn how to handle the emotions that result from a good meal or great conversation? However, positive situations can sometimes send you off kilter, too. In a game of poker, if you are dealt a pair of aces, the best possible cards you can get, it’s easy to get overexcited about winning the hand. The excitement about potentially winning creates a lot of arousal in your limbic system. While this high level of arousal might feel pleasant, the outcome is similar to negative arousal: there are fewer resources available for your stage, so you don’t think as clearly. The result is you miss ways that you could still lose that normally you would easily notice. Mistakes made this way, both at the poker table and in life, can be expensive.

David Rock
Your Brain at Work
pg. 140
GO

ON-THE-JOB APPLICATION
Post-Broadcast Activities

Activity 1: Self-Reflection and Discussion

1. What in David Rock’s presentation struck a special chord with you? Why?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
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2. Reflect on what you have learned about your brain at work. Now that you know that some mental processes take up a lot more energy than others, how will you take advantage of your mental resources to work more effectively? What steps can you take to handle distractions and remain focused on the most important tasks of your day?

______________________________________________________________________
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Continued on the next page.
3. One of the things that can derail your brain’s effectiveness is uncontrolled emotion. As David Rock explains, “Your ability to regulate your emotions instead of being at the mercy of them is central to being effective in a chaotic world.” How aware are you of your emotional state? Are you in charge of your emotions, or captive to them? What specific ways can you implement Mr. Rock’s three techniques for staying cool under pressure: labeling (for average emotional hits), reappraisal (for stronger emotional hits), and managing your expectations (for future outburst of arousal)?

4. What are YOUR leadership lessons? How will you take your new understanding of how your brain works and translate it to increasing your leadership effectiveness with your team and/or organization?
Activity 2: Make Prioritizing a Priority

How many times a week do you think “I have a pretty light day today.”? Maybe 20 years ago, but in today’s fast-paced organizations the odds are extremely high that every day is jammed packed with emails, voice mails, meetings, and project deadlines. Of course, this doesn’t even account for the critical decisions that need to be made, or the complex problems that have to be solved. Today’s business leaders must manage a significantly larger and more complex to-do list. Our expectations are high — after all, the most successful people are able to get it all done, right?

As David Rock explains, it is to our benefit to “discover the biological limits that underlie mental performance, and in the process develop more brain-smart approaches to everyday challenges.” Through understanding how the brain handles making decisions and solving problems, you will gain the advantage you need to improve performance and manage your ever-growing to-do list. Let’s take a look at what Mr. Rock calls “the Goldilocks inside us all.”

The region of your brain responsible for making decisions and solving problems is called the prefrontal cortex. Sitting behind the forehead, it is the part of your brain that thinks things through; it allows you to plan, control impulses, make decisions, and visualize a situation you’ve never seen before. And forget thinking creatively without this little gem in your brain. Don’t be fooled by its size; it may only comprise a “measly” four to five percent of the volume of your brain, but like a featherweight boxer, it’s small and powerful.

As Amy Arnsten, a professor of neurobiology at Yale Medical School, explains, “Your prefrontal cortex holds the contents of your mind at any one point. It’s where we hold thoughts that are not being generated from external sources or from the senses. We ourselves are generating them.” While amazing, your prefrontal cortex has limitations. Responsible for five functions — understanding, deciding, recalling, memorizing, and inhibiting — the prefrontal cortex requires significant resources to operate. It is also particular in nature, thus the moniker “Goldilocks.” “It has to have everything just right or it doesn’t function well.”

So what does this science lesson have to do with the importance of prioritizing? By understanding how your prefrontal cortex works — and its limitations — you need to “prioritize prioritizing.” In other words, prioritize your day before anything else — before reading emails or thinking about an upcoming meeting — because as Mr. Rock shares, “Prioritizing is one of the brain’s most energy-hungry processes. After even just a few mental activities, you may not have the resources left to prioritize.” Deciding to let other tasks jump in front of prioritizing is a choice you make to your own brain’s detriment.

Prioritizing is hard, which explains why we tend to avoid it. But it is a critical skill that is necessary to work more effectively and get more done. Prioritizing is a mental task that often requires us to make decisions about things we may have no experience with. Imagine deciding what is more important, hiring a new assistant or writing a project proposal? Prioritizing is a demanding mental task, one that David Rock likens to the coding for degree of difficulty used on ski slopes. “Mental tasks…are green, blue, and black. Prioritizing, at least in a knowledge economy full of conceptual problems, is definitely a black run. Do it when you are fresh and energized, or you might crash and burn down the hill.”
It’s clear that prioritizing is critical, and David Rock offers the following strategies for prioritizing more effectively:

- Prioritize prioritizing, as it’s an energy-intensive activity.
- Save mental energy for prioritizing by avoiding other high-energy consuming activities such as dealing with emails.
- Use the brain to interact with information rather than trying to store information, by creating visuals for complex ideas.
- List projects for the day. It saves your brain for comparing the elements instead of using energy to hold each one in your mind.
- Schedule the most attention-rich tasks when you have a fresh and alert mind. Making a tough decision might take 30 seconds when you are fresh, and be impossible when you’re not.
- Be aware of your own mental energy needs and schedule accordingly. Schedule blocks of time for different modes of thinking. Divide your day into blocks of time for deep thinking, having meetings, and routine tasks like responding to emails. Use this strategy to shift around the type of work you do to let your brain recover.
- Don’t think when you don’t have to. To be more effective and get more done, discipline yourself to not pay attention to non-urgent tasks unless, or until, it’s truly essential that you do. Learn to say no to tasks that are not among your priorities.
Think of a typical day — you’ve just turned on your computer to find numerous emails, meeting requests, and task reminders. In addition to the virtual demands on your time, various people are popping in asking, “Do you have a minute?” Before you prioritize, it’s critical that you understand how you manage — or perhaps more importantly — master your time.

Use the questionnaire below to evaluate your current time mastery practices. Respond to each statement and indicate your responses as follows. Then total each group.

**Always = 5; Most of the time = 4; Some of the time = 3; Occasionally = 2; Never = 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Crisis Management</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When a crisis occurs, I stop and consider the importance of the crisis in relation to my other priorities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can predict when crises are going to occur.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have processes for managing crises and problems when they occur.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Telephone/Email Interruptions</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When the phone rings or an email pops up, I consciously decide whether to answer it or ignore it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My voice mail greeting gives explicit instructions for callers to leave a detailed message and a time that I might reach them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I accomplish something with every business call.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Drop-in Visitors</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before accepting an interruption, I ask what it’s about so I can assess its priority relative to my own.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If someone is wasting my time, I am able to tactfully tell him or her how busy I am.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People know when not to interrupt me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Meetings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings I conduct or attend have the action items and due dates published.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings I conduct or attend start and end on time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings I conduct or attend have clear, well-defined agendas, and results.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Managing the Monkey</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When my people come to me with a problem, they leave still owning the problem.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>When my people ask for help, the last thing they would expect me to say would be, “Let me take care of it.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The priorities I have are my own and not my employees’ priorities.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Always = 5; Most of the time = 4; Some of the time = 3; Occasionally = 2; Never = 1

### 6. Procrastination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I set deadlines for myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I break seemingly overwhelming tasks into small, &quot;bite size&quot; pieces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work on the most attention-rich tasks when I have a fresh and alert mind.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Subtotal

### 7. Delegation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I use delegation as a way of training and developing people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I provide clear instructions and expectations when I delegate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I delegate as much as possible as often as possible.</td>
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</table>

Subtotal

### 8. Managing Upward

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My boss understands clearly my workload, priorities, and status of projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I clearly understand my boss’s priorities, issues, and workload.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I save time by proactively finding ways to help my boss prevent crises.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Subtotal

### 9. Project Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I make sure that milestones and responsibilities are clearly outlined at the beginning of a project.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>When managing multiple projects or priorities, I use a system to ensure that I work on the most appropriate activity at the time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I use take advantage of the project-planning tools at my disposal.</td>
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</table>

Subtotal

What four time mastery areas do you need most work on (areas with the lowest totals)?

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Now that you know how your brain works, you realize that prioritizing is a priority. The previous activity raised your awareness of where you can focus to improve the use of your time. The next step is to practice prioritizing a real day in your business life.

Imagine it is tomorrow morning and you are thinking about what you are facing for the day. For this activity start small. Use the worksheet below to manage your top three priorities for your day. Implement the strategies shared by David Rock to prioritize more effectively and get more done.

**Rankings:** I = Important and urgent; II = Important but less urgent; III = Less important and urgent; IV = Less important and less urgent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Three Priorities:</th>
<th>Rank:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ______________________</td>
<td>1. ____________</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. ______________________</td>
<td>2. ____________</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. ______________________</td>
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</table>

**Action Steps** (where possible, include by whom, resources and support, and potential barriers or resistance):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deadline(s):</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ______________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. ______________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. ______________________</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Activity 3: When Collaboration is Cold, Put on a SCARF.

Working in silos is becoming a thing of the past. Today’s organizations are increasingly cross-functional and collaborative in nature. Within this structure, conflicts can arise that negatively impact productivity. In today’s social business world, the ability to collaborate is central to creativity, innovation, and success. In order to stay ahead of the competition, everyone within an organization must work incredibly well together — like a well-oiled machine.

But how can everything run smoothly when human nature pops up and the machine grinds to a halt due to conflict? As David Rock explains, “The problems that occur between people could be reduced if there were a wider understanding of some of the basic needs of the brain…there are ‘social needs,’ which if not met, create a sense of threat that can quickly devolve into conflicts between people.” Understanding how your brain works when you work with others is the key to effective collaboration.

David Rock’s research for Your Brain at Work found that the brain has some basic requirements for collaboration:

- The brain views status as a primary reward or threat and will go to great lengths to protect or increase status.
- The brain likes to know what is going on by recognizing patterns in the world. The brain likes to feel certain.
- The perception of being in control is a major driver of behavior.
- The brain needs social connections, a feeling of being safely connected to others.
- The sense of fairness drives a lot of behavior.

These requirements can be seen by the brain as either a reward or a threat. While writing his book, David Rock noticed surprising patterns that lead him to recognize the five domains of social experience that the brain treats the same as survival issues. These domains form the SCARF model: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.

The SCARF model gives a language to those experiences that may otherwise be unconscious. When you are aware of how your brain interprets the five domains of the SCARF model — and can recognize them as they occur — you have a powerful tool for improving performance and collaborating with others.

The implications of the SCARF model for the workplace are clear. As Mr. Rock shares, “Although a job is often regarded as a purely economic transaction, in which people exchange their labor for financial compensation, the brain experiences the workplace first and foremost as a social system.”
“Leaders who understand this dynamic can more effectively engage their employees' best talents, support collaborative teams, and create an environment that fosters productive change. Indeed, the ability to intentionally address the social brain in the service of optimal performance will be a distinguishing leadership capability in the years ahead.”

As you become more familiar with the SCARF model — and how your brain utilizes it — you can begin to consciously apply this powerful tool. Here are some things you can try immediately as you begin to implement the SCARF model in your collaborative relationships:

- Watch out for people’s status being threatened.
- Reduce status threats in others by giving people positive feedback.
- Watch for uncertainty creating a feeling of threat; practice noticing this.
- Watch for a feeling of reduced autonomy creating a sense of threat; practice noticing this.
- Find ways to create choice and a perception of autonomy whenever you can.
- Anytime you meet someone new, make an effort to connect on a human level as early as possible to reduce the threat response.
- Actively encourage people around you to connect on a human level to create better collaboration.
- Be open and transparent about your dealings with people.
- Watch out for fairness being linked to other issues such as certainty, autonomy, or relatedness, where you can get intense emotional responses.
How can YOU implement the SCARF model? For each of the five domains of social experience, describe in detail how you will implement each one. Use the question posed to get you started.

**Status:** When collaborating with others, what are some specific strategies you can implement to ensure other people’s status is not being threatened? What can you do to boost the status of those around you and get the most from them?

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Certainty: While creating a sense of certainty on your team and/or in your organization in today’s ever changing environment is not always possible, what can you do to manage uncertainty?

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*Continued on the next page.*
Autonomy: When collaborating with others, even a subtle perception of autonomy can improve performance. What are some ways you can delegate control — or at least the perception of control — to others? What can you do to introduce choice into your collaborative mix?

Relatedness: Personal differences are often perceived as a threat by our brain and negatively impact collaboration. What are some ways you can interact with others that will bring out points of similarity, strengthen social connections, build trust, and increase a sense of relatedness?

Continued on the next page.
**Fairness:** When a situation is perceived as unfair, it undermines trust and creates conflict. Collaboration can’t flourish in any organization if people perceive the environment as unfair. What are you doing to ensure that you are being open and transparent to those around you? Conversely, a sense of unfairness can be created if unfairness is tolerated. How do you create an environment where fairness is expected and encouraged? What processes do you have in place to ensure that unfairness will not be tolerated on your teams or in your organization?
Activity 4: Change Your World

“Change is hard, and facilitating change in others is even harder. Research indicates that we have more influence over other people, but less control than previously thought.

The brain constantly changes based on external factors, but it can also be changed by shifting people’s attention. Shifting other people’s attention from a threat state to focusing on what you want them to focus on is the central challenge to creating real change.”

– From Your Brain at Work

Often, we rely on two well known strategies to facilitate change: feedback and — when that doesn’t work — problem solving. After all, if we can find the cause of the problem and tell others how they can resolve it, things remain rational, unemotional, and under your control. The truth is problems at work, like the organizations we work in and the people we work with, are not always rational or unemotional, and keeping control is not the answer either. It’s time to look at a new approach to change your world.

The excerpt that follows is from Your Brain at Work and is reprinted with permission from the author, David Rock.

The Trouble with Feedback

Giving others feedback is often the first strategy people use to facilitate change. Yet, surprisingly, giving feedback is rarely the right way to create real change. While there are many “techniques” to improve the performance of feedback, people miss the basic reality of this approach: feedback creates a strong threat for people in most situations. The statement “let me tell you what others have been saying about you” is one of the fastest, easiest, and most consistent ways of making someone deeply anxious.

Feedback is something that organizations worldwide have mandated over the last decade in the form of the annual “performance review.” Mike Morrison, at the time the dean of Toyota University in Los Angeles, commented that annual performance reviews, “Essentially just reduce performance for six days each year: three days while people prepare for it, and three days recovering from it.” Performance review training manuals tell managers to give “constructive performance feedback.” The problem with “constructive performance feedback” is that, like a wolf sniffing a meal across a field, even a subtle status threat is picked up unconsciously by our deeply social brain, no matter how nicely it’s couched. As “constructive” as you try to make it, feedback packs a punch. The result is that most feedback conversations revolve around people defending themselves. There has to be a better way to facilitate change.

The Problem with Problems

When feedback doesn’t work, [we often] drill down to find the cause of the problem. This deductive approach to problem solving works in many domains of life, such as finding out why your car has overheated or your software malfunctioned. Cars and software are linear systems. Problems at work, like corporations and people generally, are often complex and dynamic.
When you follow a thread down to the root of a problem, as interesting as it might seem at first, you often end up arriving at the conclusion that there is “too much work,” “not enough money,” or “no time”…These types of answers are rarely helpful, and worse still, they leave you exhausted, due to the downward spiral created. The more negative connections you make, the less dopamine you have, the fewer resources you have for solving the next problem, and the more negative connections you make. And on it goes. In this low-energy state, everything looks hard. Increasingly risk averse, you don’t have the motivation to take action. Eventually, all you feel like doing is taking a nap.

From Constructive Performance Feedback (CPF) to Facilitating Positive Change (FPC)

People have insights when their brain is in a specific state. Insights happen when people think globally and widely rather than focusing on the details…As people are often already anxious when stuck at an impasse [i.e., problem], and anxiety generally makes people’s views narrow and their brains noisier, it’s important to reduce people’s anxiety and increase their positive emotions — in other words, to shift them from an away state to a toward state. A great way to do this is using elements of the SCARF model.

You could help the person increase her sense of **status**, perhaps by encouraging her. Or increase someone’s sense of **certainty** by making implicit issues more explicit, say, by clarifying your objectives. Or increase a person’s sense of **autonomy** by ensuring that he is making the decisions and coming up with the idea, not just listening to your suggestions.

Another useful step is to help people simplify a problem into as few words as possible, to reduce the load on their prefrontal cortex and thus reduce its overall activation level. Sometimes reducing a problem to one short sentence can be enough to bring about insights on its own.

Once the other person is in the right state of mind, and you have a problem stated simply, your job, according to the research, is to help people reflect, though in a quiet way. You want people to look inward, but without dwelling on the details of the problem. This is a subtle technique, but once you see it a few times, it soon becomes clear. Your goal is to facilitate the state of mind that you have when you first wake up, when you easily connect distant ideas, and subtle thoughts can rise to the surface.

The questions to ask at this point should focus people’s attention on their own mental process, at a high level. As Mark Beeman says in the first edition of the *NeuroLeadership Journal*, you can increase the likelihood of insight through “variables that increase attention to subtle connections.” You want people to focus on their own subtle connections, and a simple way to do this is just to ask about subtle connections:

- If you stop and think more deeply here, do you think you know what you need to do to resolve this?
- What quiet hunches do you have about a solution, deeper inside?
- How close to a solution are you?
- Which pathway to a solution would be best to follow here?
One big advantage of this technique is that it raises people’s status by implicitly saying, “You have good ideas. Let’s explore what your good ideas are, rather than think about mine.”

These kinds of questions generate a whole new thread to follow. Instead of your looking for a gap in the form of the source of another person’s problem, the other person is finding a gap in his own thinking process. It’s not you searching for problems; it’s him searching for gaps in his thinking process. You want people to look for assumptions or decisions that don’t make sense upon further reflection.

This approach is so different from what normally happens in the workplace. The poor quality of feedback is one of the biggest complaints by employees everywhere. This is an unfortunate cycle that new managers often go through. To begin with, they give lots of feedback, thinking people will appreciate this. Then they discover how people are easily threatened by feedback. They notice the long arguments and wasting time, and soon learn to not give feedback, but to avoid it. Then, at some point, they are forced to give feedback — by a performance review, or a mandate from their own boss. So their next technique is to waffle — to not say much at all — to avoid threatening the other person. The brain research explains not just why this cycle happens, but also a new approach that is likely to work better.

If you don’t practice vetoing your desire to solve other people’s problems, your default approach, it’s easy to waste time in unnecessary discussions driven by people protecting their status. When your objective is helping other people be effective, sometimes to move fastest you have to put on your own brakes.

As a leader, it is their job to help other people be more effective through finding their own insights. The technique to do this — letting go of “constructive performance feedback” and replacing it with “facilitating positive change” — seems counterintuitive to popular organizational process. But as David Rock has shared, the neuroscience proves this technique is effective. “Instead of thinking about people’s problems and giving feedback or making suggestions, change can be facilitated faster in many instances if you think about people’s thinking, and help others think about their own thinking better.”
For this activity, think about how your organization provides feedback — whether through a process of feedback on a regular basis, only through an annual performance review, or both. As you reflect on the lessons gleaned from Mr. Rock’s neuroscience research, what can you do to move from constructive performance feedback to facilitating positive change — and in the process facilitate a change within your own organization?

Imagine you are presenting a proposal to move your organization from constructive performance feedback (most likely you currently use some method of an annual performance review) to a culture of facilitating positive change. As you think about how you can ensure that senior leaders within your organization will not only be open to this proposal, but ultimately adopt it, you will want to include the research findings that support the effectiveness of this technique as well as the benefits for 1) the employees, and 2) the organization. Be persuasive! You want your culture to be one that effectively facilitates change.

Working together in small groups, use the space below to capture some ideas you want to include in your proposal to make this change a reality.

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Final Activity: Action Planning

Now is the time to get moving. Everything in today’s broadcast supports the need to take action and start implementing the lessons shared. Picture yourself six months from now. You’re reflecting with a sense of pride and satisfaction on how you have implemented the strategies shared by Mr. Rock. You better understand your brain at work, and are using your knowledge to overcome distractions, regain focus, and work more effectively. What have you done to foster an understanding of the brain throughout your organization, enhancing people’s sense of success and increasing productivity?

_______________________________________________________________
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Back to the present. With the above goal set for six months from now, what intermediary steps do you need to take to reach that goal?

- What do you need to do within three months?
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- What do you need to do by the end of this month?
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- What do you need to do by the end of this week?
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- What do you need to do tomorrow?
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Materials Written by David Rock

Books


Website

You may also benefit from visiting the following websites associated with David Rock:

- [http://davidrock.net](http://davidrock.net)
Question Sheet

Use this form to write your discussion question for David Rock. Please write legibly.

Name (optional):
_______________________________________________________________

Organization:
_______________________________________________________________

Location:
_______________________________________________________________

Your question (25 words or fewer):
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Email to: leadership2011@linkageinc.com

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Broadcast Evaluation Form

We invite your feedback on this presentation: Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long. Please return this completed form to your site coordinator or fax it to 781-402-5556.

NAME________________________________ TITLE ________________________________

ORGANIZATION _______________________________________________________________

Please indicate functional area (only check one):

- Finance  - Human Resources/Organizational Development  - Manufacturing/Operations
- Marketing  - R&D  - Sales  - Other (specify) ___________________________________

How many people do you have reporting to you (include all levels)? **Number:** ______________

Please indicate your job level (only check one):

- President or Officer  - Vice President  - Director  - Manager/Supervisor  - Individual Contributor

1) Please indicate a rating for each of the statements below by checking the appropriate box.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>The length of the presentation was ideal.</td>
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<td>As a result of participating in this program, I will be more effective in my role.</td>
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<td>The participant materials were useful.</td>
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<td>The Q&amp;A session was valuable.</td>
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2) Please give a general overall comment about the program: ___________________________________________

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3) How can we improve these broadcasts? _____________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

4) May we use these comments for promotional purposes (including name and org.)?  **Y**  **N**

5) On a scale of 1-10 (10 = Outstanding), how would you rate this session? **Rating:** _________

6) From the Linkage Thought Leader Series lineup, which speakers are you most excited to see? *Please rate your top three, “1” being most excited.*

___ Adrian Gostick ___ Charlene Li ___ Jason Jennings ___ Atul Gawande
___ Steven Johnson ___ Bill Conaty ___ Paul Sullivan ___ David Rock

7) For future lineups, which speakers would you be most interested in seeing? *Please rate your top five, “1” being most interested.*

___ Seth Godin ___ Indra Nooyi ___ Stephen Shapiro  Other: ______________________
___ Robert Knowling ___ Tim Sanders ___ Robert Gibbs
___ Robert Johnson ___ Chip Conley ___ Doug Conant

8) Which types of speakers are you most interested in seeing? *Please rate your top two.*

___ Former C-Level Executives ___ Thought Leaders/Management Gurus
___ Political Leaders ___ Athletic Leaders/Coaches
___ Military Leaders ___ Other ___________________________