

The Leadership Landscape



**Winter
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A periodical published by the faculty of the Federal Executive Institute to help you continue your growth as a public sector leader.

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Welcome from the Dean:

First and foremost, best wishes for a Happy New Year from all of the faculty and staff at the Federal Executive Institute. We hope your holiday season was restful, relaxing, and will help launch you into an exciting and turbulent period for public servants. And with this edition's heavy emphasis on the latest knowledge about the neuroscience of leadership and wellness, The Leadership Landscape is perfectly positioned to better and holistically prepare you for new changes and challenges. As Plato reminds us about education and physical activity, "with these two means, man can attain perfection." Happy reading.

-Dr. Pete Ronayne, Dean of Faculty

Wellness and Balance Tip of the Month:

As the cold weather settles in and holiday goodies still fill the kitchen, why not take some health tips from the Scandinavians, a people use to less than balmy temperatures and yet who still eat well?

Tip #1

Try a Nordic breakfast of warming, nutritious muesli. Buy pre-made muesli (Alpen Muesli, No-Sugar-Added or Hodgson Mill's Apples & More Muesli, for example) or make your own by simply combining ½ c. uncooked rolled oats, 1 sm. chopped apple or ¼ c. dried fruit, 1 tsp. cinnamon, and ¼ c. chopped walnuts. Prepare muesli by adding water or milk and popping it into the microwave for a few minutes or prepare the night before by mixing with a cup of natural yogurt and letting it sit over-night in the refrigerator. Add a hardboiled egg to your breakfast for some additional protein.

Tip #2

Northern Europeans are excellent at getting outdoors for some brisk winter activities. Try taking a trip to the local ice skating rink or make a weekend excursion to a ski lodge for some skiing or tubing. Take the kids walking through a neighborhood with lots of lights. For an indoor break, try a yoga or an exercise DVD to loosen up muscles tight from scrunching against the cold.

Just remember to enjoy the holidays! Relieve stress by allotting time to relax and have some fun.

Read more about winter health and safety at [Healthy U.](#)

Waking Up the Mind – the Leader’s Imperative

By Michael Rawlings, J.D., FEI Senior Faculty

One of the greatest challenges we face in leadership development is how to anchor meaningful change. For example, it is one thing to develop an awareness of growth areas based on a 360° assessment; it’s quite another thing to take practical steps to alter behavior patterns or attitudes that underlie them. During a course on Emotional Intelligence one learns to distinguish that the amygdala gets hijacked in certain situations – yet learning to manage this is easier said than done. Four areas that cause ‘High Potentials’ to derail include Lack of Clarity, Inability to Work in Teams, Insensitivity, and Significant Change. (Note Hay Group 1999 Survey of Fortune 500 Companies) Once potential derailers are identified, what’s an exec to do?

The journey of self-awareness and self-improvement on critical leadership competencies often takes tremendous self-discipline and a long-term commitment – not to mention significant courage. It might include working with an executive coach, a mentor, a stress counselor, a therapist or other resources to assist with changing patterns of thought or behavior.

For most of the past century there has been a growing recognition of the connection between one’s thoughts and one’s reality. Popular books including, Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, (published 1936 – over 15 million copies sold), Napoleon Hill’s *Think and Grow Rich*, (published in 1937 – over 20 million copies sold), and Norman Vincent Peale’s *The Power of Positive Thinking*, (published in 1952 - over 5 million copies sold), led the trend at mid-century. They have been followed by hundreds of other titles and training programs which have exhorted us to pay attention to and control our thoughts as the source of what we are creating in our lives and in our world. An underlying theory of this genre is that the relationship between our thoughts and attitudes and our reality exists whether or not we are consciously aware of the connection. Therefore, making this distinction and then learning/relearning to be intentional about our thoughts and attitudes is critical – particularly for those in positions of leadership. Science has been confirming and advancing some of the theories of once questioned or criticized thought-leaders including Mary Baker Eddy, Edgar Cayce, Norman Cousins, Jose Silva and others.

More than a decade ago while still in the corporate sector, I had an opportunity to participate in two weeks of intensive “Peak Performance” work that incorporated biofeedback, neurotherapy, sound and light therapy, and The Tomatis Method®. “Thanks to the ear, man moves, reaches vertically, communicates, listens and thinks.” Dr. Alfred A. Tomatis, pioneer of

psychoacoustics. I was amazed to be able to observe and measure my own progress in mind control day after day. It's an unforgettable experience to have interacted with computer programs through electrodes connected to my head, watching as I learned to control the synapses by watching the screen and altering my thought patterns. Learning to raise and lower my body temperature a couple of degrees in short periods of time through mental control measured by caps connected to my finger tips, confirmed for me the importance of these tools for wellness and even potentially for survival. The sound and light therapies, tailored to the individual based on initial intensive aural testing, were designed among other things to open new brain patterns and to break through blockages. This experience more than piqued my curiosity – it woke me up to the emerging area of neuroscience and convinced me that this work is not only for reparative therapy as it is most often used, nor is it in government solely relevant to leadership in defense, intelligence and science where it has been most frequently studied and applied. It holds vast promise for prime performance development of all leaders. It was also just plain fun!

The fields of neuroscience and neuroplasticity offer the hope – and increasingly proof - that our brains are not hardwired as children but rather that they have a lifelong plasticity – an ability to change. Thus, patterns that do not serve us in our personal or professional lives can be altered. There is now a NeuroLeadership Institute whose purpose is to “advance applied research at the intersection of neuroscience and leadership. Simply stated, the Institute will help leaders better understand how the human brain works in order to improve and transform the way individuals and institutions learn, behave and perform.” Source: www.neuroleadership.org.

Neuroscience will not likely replace the need for the personal desire for growth or the commitment and discipline needed for leadership development. However, it seems like a very good idea for us as leaders to build our individual and organizational awareness and knowledge of the emerging connections between neuroscience and leadership and to look for opportunities to develop ourselves and those in our organizations using these new technologies to supercharge our efforts.

Additional suggested resources:

The Tomatis Method® www.tomatis.com

Mayo Clinic and Biofeedback <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/biofeedback/SA00083>

Society for Neuroscience www.sfn.org

The Secret Life of the Brain (PBS Series) <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/brain/outreach/press.html>

Brain Fitness: A Critical Factor for Leader Success
By PJ Rooney, Ph.D., FEI Senior Faculty

Peter Drucker, a well known leadership guru, espoused that leadership development is ultimately a process of self-development. Learning and self development were principle tenets of Drucker's life. "Every three to four years, I pick a new subject. It may be Japanese art, it may be economics. Three years are by no means enough to master a subject, but they are enough to understand it. So for more than 60 years I have kept studying one subject at a time." Peter Drucker's self development program reflects what leading brain research suggests is imperative for thriving as we age, namely, "brain fitness." Drucker kept his brain fit and active well into his 90s, during which time he acted as a leadership development consultant to businesses and non-profit organizations while also continuing to write about leadership.

The latest brain research challenges long held beliefs about adult learning. It was once believed that as we aged the brain's networks became fixed; that is the "wiring" of the adult brain (those networks that allow us to hear, see, feel, move, and think) was unchangeable. In the past two decades, an enormous amount of neuroscience research reveals that the brain never stops changing. As one learns a new skill or memorizes a new fact, a functional change in the brain takes place that represents the new knowledge. This capacity of the brain to change is called plasticity, or more accurately, neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is the lifelong ability of the brain to reorganize neural pathways based on new experiences. This special characteristic allows the brain's estimated 100 billion nerve cells, or neurons, to constantly lay down new pathways for neural communication and to rearrange existing ones throughout life, which aids the processes of learning, memory and decision making.

These advances in neuroscience have led researchers to yet another important discovery - "use it or lose it" pertains not only to your muscles, it also pertains to your gray matter. Different areas of your brain will atrophy for lack of practice. A very repetitive and routine-driven life, lacking in novelty and stimulation can cause decline. We have brains that are "programmed" to learn; in other words, our brains want to learn and adapt to new environments. Without presenting new stimuli, our brains are not building new neural pathways or rearranging existing ones causing our memory capacity to decline and our ability to learn more difficult. The trick therefore, is to take on new challenges that are not too difficult, yet stretch the brain. The benefits of exercising your brain are both short-term (e.g., improved concentration and memory, sustained mental clarity under stressful situations), and long-term (e.g., potentially lowering the incidence of dementia or Alzheimer's symptoms).

Researchers agree that the best brain building activities should teach you something new. Practicing targeted exercises that engage the senses and the memory are of greatest benefit. New activities should be challenging, get progressively more difficult, and engage as many of your brain's processing centers (e.g., sight, hearing, touch) as possible. The most valuable exercises are also novel or surprising as these experiences exercise areas of the brain that make you bright and alert. It might seem difficult to find activities that meet all of those criteria. Consider Peter Drucker's method, "So for more than 60 years I have kept studying one subject at a time." (For additional information on brain development and exercises: www.pbs.org or www.sharpbrains.com)

Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain
John J. Ratey & Eric Hagerman

Reviewed by Peter Ronayne, Ph.D.
Dean of Faculty, Federal Executive Institute

At the start of this new year, no doubt a majority of Federal executives find themselves careening into 2009 after a hectic holiday schedule with an eye on the transition turbulence ahead. Another “event” likely transpired as well: the New Years Resolution. Since too many Americans find themselves at least a few pounds heavier after too many waist expanding indulgences, the visions that now dance in our heads involve weight loss and improved fitness.

Enter Dr. John J. Ratey and his new book *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. The exercise/wellness connection is well known and widely documented, particularly in terms of weight loss and cardiovascular conditioning. With groundbreaking research and compelling case studies, Ratey provides extra motivation to hit the gym and get moving to inaugurate 2009. Where Ratey and co-author Eric Hagerman innovate is in illuminating the positive connection between exercise and striking improvements in handling stress, depression, addictions, aging – and learning. The exhortation in *Spark* is unambiguous: “exercise is the single most powerful tool you have to optimize your brain function.”

As Ratey explains, “the relationship between food, physical activity, and learning is hardwired into the brain’s circuitry.” In an early, attention-grabbing tale, Dr. Ratey introduces Naperville, Illinois School District 203 and their new (revolutionary) approach to physical education. Gym teacher Phil Lawler envisioned and implemented a “new PE” which would use sports and movement and dance and other tailored activities to actually teach kids how to improve their physical fitness with an emphasis on effort and aerobic challenge.

The result? Yes, a fully reformed and leading edge physical education program with noteworthy impact on student fitness. More striking: the increasingly unambiguous impact on academic performance and test scores. Concurrent with Naperville’s fitness-based approach to PE have come dramatically improved test scores, outpacing those of better funded schools and competing at higher levels than ever in international math and science tests.

Thus, exercise emerges throughout the book as the “spark” that triggers improved learning and heightened resilience in response to stress and aging and hormonal changes. As Ratey consistently emphasizes, exercise better prepares us for learning through heightened senses, improved mood, and invigorated energy. Since our brains are “more Play-doh than porcelain”, exercise is a key tool for enhanced learning. Researchers have uncovered the role exercise plays in improving brain “plasticity, to include neuron growth, strength, and receptivity (get the book and enjoy an “all you can eat buffet” about brain-derived neurotrophic factors).

While exercise as panacea for all that ails us can veer towards reductionism, Ratey’s research

makes a powerful case. For leaders, all of whom need to be lifelong learners, the implications are huge. Yes, wellness and fitness improve us physically in essential ways. And with each passing day, we more fully realize how physical fitness has serendipitous impact on our mental and psychological well-being. And reassuringly, you don't have to cut the profile of Michael Phelps in a Speedo to enjoy the benefits of exercise. Fit to each individual, a regimen combining various aerobic activities (walking, jogging, running, swimming, biking, active sports) and the use of a heart monitor to at least initially gauge intensity can have life-altering implications. And after all, isn't that what New Years resolutions are all about?

Review of Jeremy Hsu's "The Secrets of Storytelling"

By Hayley Taylor, Research Fellow

Hsu, Jeremy (2008). "The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love a Good Yarn." *Scientific America*, <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=the-secrets-of-storytelling&print=true>.

In his article *The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love a Good Yarn*, Jeremy Hsu explores recent studies which link storytelling to both human evolutionary and social development. Current scholars have revealed three main areas of study in connecting stories to humans: 1) evolutionary history, 2) cross-cultural, universal story themes, and 3) as a persuasive tool.

In relation to evolutionary history, psychologists deduce that stories play an important function in human social cognition. One researcher equates stories to flight simulators: interacting with stories helps developing humans to learn to interact socially in a given culture. As we evolved and communities burgeoned, storytelling was also used as an aid to tracking members. For reasons still being explored, the human memory more readily retains stories than mere facts. This is why storytelling makes sense as a tool for remembering human history. In addition, a good narrative unites the storyteller, the listeners, and the story characters emotionally. Called theory of mind, this trait is important for "social interaction and communal living," according to Hsu. Studies show, moreover, that those who score higher on empathy tests are more easily transported by a story

Moreover, universal story themes point to a common human psyche, say some scholars. In fact, one in depth study surveying 90 folktale collections from a range of societies reveals a stunning similarity in themes. Romance, heroism, and sacrifice are identified as the three most common prototypes, two thirds of the tales falling into these categories. In addition, the overwhelmingly similar depictions of genders across cultures may "refer to the classic Darwinian emphasis on reproductive health in women...and on the desirable male ability to provide for a family," according to one researcher. This evidence again points to a common ancestry, concludes Hsu.

Finally, Hsu touches on recent research examining narrative as a persuasive tool. Many studies demonstrate the immense influence of movies, ads with stories, and literature on people's behavior. The benefit to this, asserts Hsu, is in harnessing this knowledge and resultant power to promote positive messages, such as good health. This article helpfully illumines new research on storytelling and the many insights into the human past and the current human psyche that are being uncovered. Knowledge about the social roots of the human mind has many useful applications in the fields of anthropology, psychology, advertising, business, and more.

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