

Tara Swart, Neuroscience Consultant
Session Summary: The Future Leadership Brain:
The Implications of Neuroscience for Learning in Business

Tara Swart shared a neuroscience-based analysis of how the brain works, and the implications for learning and leadership development.

Her first observation was that the brainstem connects directly to the spinal cord, so there is literally no separation between the brain and the body. Everything we experience mentally has implications for the body, and vice versa. Therefore, if we are to experience real change, it has to happen at the level of the limbic brain, not just the cortex.

Tara defined mental agility as a crucial component for effective leaders – the ability to effectively integrate logic, emotions, physical feelings, creativity, gut instinct and motivators. For this to happen, she asserted that we have to pay attention to several key “inputs” that result in a healthy, well-integrated brain:

- Oxygen
- Glucose
- Simplicity
- Rest
- Humor
- Hydration

Great leaders, she suggested, have the following attributes:

- They connect with people
- They are courageous
- They are “clever enough”
- They “walk the talk”
- They inspire others
- They “are worth following”

Several behaviors she suggested changing in order to maximize leadership effectiveness are:

- Use “we” not “I”
- Promote intelligent risk-taking
- Give praise
- Trust others
- Encourage alignment

From an executive education perspective, she recommended that executives only try to change two of these behaviors at a time. Any more than that will produce sub-optimal results.

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