



Put neuro-leadership to work for you

It's easier (and more effective) than you might think

By Pierrette Desrosiers

As an entrepreneur you are a leader. One of your important roles, therefore, is... to lead, which means you need to motivate others and increase teamwork. But are you sure you know how best to motivate? If not, the new field of neuro-leadership could help you.

Neuro-leadership, a term coined by David Rock, applies the findings from the field of neuroscience to the practice of leadership. By doing so, neuro-leadership provides a scientific framework for understanding the practice of leading others.

Neuro-leadership provides insights into how we think and why we act and react the way we do. Importantly, it also provides insights into how our leadership affects the brains of others. In other words, knowing more about both your brain and the brains of others can help you be a better leader.

There are four domains of interest for the field of neuro-leadership:

- Decision making and problem solving
- Staying cool under pressure
- Collaborating with others
- Facilitating change

As a leader, you control 50 to 70 per cent of the climate that influences your team. This is because emotions are contagious, and the leader is the thermostat for the team.

Let's examine the SCARF model developed by David Rock for getting along and improving collaboration with others.

Our brain is wired to constantly scan for five social demands: *Status*, *Certainty*, *Autonomy*, *Relatedness*, and *Fairness*. This is why we react to perceived threats instantly and before the rational part of our brain reacts. We are much more sensitive, and react more forcefully, to perceived threats than to rewards.

What happens when one or more of those five conditions are threatened? Your emotional brain takes over the resources that are required for thinking clearly, evaluating and planning. Instead you are left with three instinctual choices: fight, flee or freeze.

Therefore, you have little or no access to *your* intelligence. The more you perceive a threat, the stronger the emotion and the stronger the reaction.

The five elements of the SCARF model, below, are what the brain perceives, evaluates and responds to when interacting with others.

Status relates to our perceived position within a situation relative to others. We're constantly aware of it and measuring it. This is our social self-esteem. We have all experienced stating an opinion that was rejected, or being humiliated while part of a group. Because we react emotionally before rationally, the

more our brain interprets a threat to our ego or self-esteem, the more destabilized we are. Our rational brains are hijacked by our emotional brains. Some entrepreneurs have told me that after being humiliated they have been affected for years.

Certainty relates to the fact that the more uncertain we perceive our environment to be, the more stressed and anxious we become.

Autonomy deals with our perception of whether or not we have choices that will let us control our environment and be accountable for our decisions.

Relatedness or relationships: Are we inside or outside of the group? If the quality of a relationship is weak, or if conflicts are present, we are less productive. We are more stressed, more disengaged, less creative and more unsatisfied.

Fairness is how we consider equity, or what is fair. As humans, we are highly sensitive to this aspect of our lives.

As a leader what could you do to increase collaboration while keeping in mind this SCARF model?

Status: With words and actions, preserve and nourish the status of others. As a leader, acknowledge your mistakes in a humble manner, thereby lowering how your status is perceived by others. It has been shown that just speaking to the boss or a person of higher status will generally activate threat responses in our brains.

Certainty: Be clear and consistent in what you say and do, so your team understands both their roles and your expectations.

Autonomy: Ask for ideas, and engage others in decision-making. Give them autonomy in their jobs related to their levels of competence. Doing so results in happier and more productive employees.

Relatedness: Nourish relationships by being both respectful and empathetic. Put yourself in the shoes of others.

Fairness: Preserve and promote fairness and be aware of every sign that could be interpreted as unfairness. Be transparent, ask questions and communicate with others in order to assess the working environment.

All these discoveries about the brain apply to you, your family and your employees. As a leader, with the power to influence the climate of a team, use that influence positively to "raise the temperature" of your teamwork. **CG**

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