

Think design

With the brain in mind



by Silvia Damiano, *About My Brain*

IN 2006, AMERICAN AUTHOR DANIEL PINK RELEASED HIS BOOK *A WHOLE NEW MIND*. IN THIS BOOK, PINK STATED THAT THE FUTURE BELONGS TO A DIFFERENT KIND OF PERSON WITH A DIFFERENT KIND OF MIND: ARTISTS, INVENTORS, STORYTELLERS, CREATIVE AND HOLISTIC 'RIGHT-BRAIN' THINKERS WHOSE ABILITIES MARK THE FAULT LINE BETWEEN WHO GETS AHEAD AND WHO DOESN'T.

Drawing on research from around the world, Pink outlined six fundamental human abilities that are absolute essentials for professional success and personal fulfilment. One of these is the ability of 'design'. This book was like a breath of fresh air for those people who devote their lives to thinking outside the square and helping to make the world a more beautiful place.

To fully comprehend the extent of Pink's statements about the 'right brain', it is useful to remind ourselves that our brain is divided into two hemispheres. The left one is usually associated with logical thinking – facts, numbers and technical interests – while the right side is referred to 'as the one that gives us the capacity to be more creative and artistic'.

Furthermore, there is a tool that assesses our thinking preferences. It was developed by Ned Herrmann 30 years ago while working as the HR Director for General Electric. Herrmann created a four-quadrant model (basically a metaphor for the brain) to explain that our brains are wired in a particular way. Even though the model is quite simplistic and many things have changed since then in terms of neuroscience research, there is no doubt that our thinking

preferences have an impact on virtually everything we do, including the way we communicate, make decisions, problem-solve and manage others.

In understanding thinking style preferences, it is important to recognise our own preferences and those of other people and adjust the way we communicate when we want to get our point across to people who naturally think differently. Once we are aware of our preference, it is possible to develop other circuits in the brain to which we have not paid enough attention as they are not our preferred ones.

How does all of this fit within the world of business and design?

We are clearly living in a new era (started in 2000), referred to by some as the 'Digital Age' and described by Gary Hamel as the 'Age of Revolution'. Rapid change, endless access to information and technology and ever-evolving business models are revolutionising how we approach everything we do. To remain competitive in this context, we must keep the big picture in mind, be flexible to continual change and think ahead – all of which require the leverage of the power of our imagination to the fullest.

Left Brain vs. Right

'IF YOU DO TODAY WHAT YOU DID YESTERDAY, YOU WILL BE BEATEN. IF YOU DO TODAY WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING NOW, YOU WILL BE COMPETITIVE. TO WIN, YOU MUST SEEK TO DO TODAY WHAT OTHERS WILL BE DOING TOMORROW.'

Imagination allows us to escape our current time, place or perspective in favour of an alternative context. Being able to imagine something involves the activation of certain circuits in the brain. These circuits are also part of what neuroscientists call 'the default network' which tends to become active when we are thinking about ourselves, daydreaming, ruminating about past events or planning for the future. Many of us may have had the experience of staring at a computer screen. To others it may look like our brain is not active at all. These are moments of escape, when other parts of the brain activate and they are useful for many purposes, one of which is the ability to imagine or create something we have not thought of before.

The biggest challenge is – for those who are primarily 'numbers and bottom line' oriented – to accept that time spent on innovation, design and forward planning is time well spent and will provide the financial rewards that businesses look for. It is, in fact, the acceptance of a new paradigm which requires a mindset change.

Nowadays, businesses require a different approach and image to what they did in the 70s, 80s and 90s. It is hard to envisage a business today that can survive without a 'well-designed' presence, particularly on the web. We are competing for people's attention more now than at any other time in history. The human attention span has been reduced to a few seconds because of the innumerable distractions that we face on a daily basis. In order to attract viewers and become memorable, we need to resort to the use of colour, shapes, symbols, fonts and images that can generate in a flash 'the emotional connection' with the client that we all crave.

According to Professor Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, in today's workplace, more than 50 per cent

of workers do creative work. What creative people do is present information in a novel way. From a PowerPoint presentation to a group that we want to persuade to the branding of our company or the packaging of our products, design is everywhere. Great design, as I see it, is an essential condition for business success at present and in the years to come.

Design has the ability to influence the quality of what we offer before the production of our goods even begins. Not only that, great design inspires, motivates and reunites people. It creates identity and a sense of belonging, a social need that all of us, as humans, desire deeply.

When imagination is stimulated at the beginning of any enterprise and great design becomes one of the foundation stones, the focus on excellence and the sense of pride that follows can create the difference between success and failure, good or great, mediocre or awesome. Which side of the fence would you choose for your business?

'If you do today what you did yesterday, you will be beaten. If you do today what others are doing now, you will be competitive. To win, you must seek to do today what others will be doing tomorrow.' Unknown author. 🗑️

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HOW TO BEST CONNECT WITH CLIENTS

*by Maria Capsanis,
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Okay, so what's in it for you as a young designer starting out? Why do you need to know yourself and why do you need to change and grow as a professional? Recognising the benefits of self-awareness provides an opportunity to improve as a design professional. Sure, you are together and know it all! However, the bigger issues are long-term employability and workplace resilience – making yourself the best employee you can be, making your team more efficient and making the organisation more profitable.

Take this situation. You think your client believes your concept is crap. Now what? Silvia Damiano's suggestion: pay attention to what is happening. Remain in the present. Do not allow your emotions to lead you to think ahead. Ensure that you keep an open mind to what the client is putting to you and say, 'I can see your point', which will help you to stay connected with your client. Why is this useful? What you are doing is developing a sense of mindfulness where you pay particular attention to your thoughts and talk to your self in a positive and constructive manner at a time of difficulty.
