

Leading Learning: Dawn of the Right-Brain Meeting

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Dawn of the Right-Brain Meeting

Ever feel like you have a split personality doing your job? Trying to design a dynamic general session learning experience one minute and then spending the next hour playing out catering guarantees on an Excel spreadsheet? Meetings professionals draw on both left-and right-brain skills and aptitudes on a daily basis.

The ability to draw on both sides of your brain will be even more valuable in the future economy, according to author Dan Pink. That will be true not only for your own career, but also for rethinking meetings and conferences to better deliver value to your members and stakeholders. In his new book, *A Whole New Mind*, Pink asserts that the left-brain aptitudes of the Information Age (logic, quantitative reasoning, and analysis) are giving way to more right-directed aptitudes (design, meaning, and story), which he associates with the dawning Conceptual Era. Why? Three reasons:

Abundance: We live in an era when a higher percentage of the population has its basic material needs met. Accumulating more stuff (think of the old George Carlin skit) will not bring greater satisfaction. Acquiring objects of better design and more meaning will be more desirable.

Asia: If it can be outsourced and produced more cheaply somewhere else, it most likely will be. Making products of decent quality at a low price is now a minimum expectation to get into the marketplace.

Automation: Technology has not only driven the costs of manufacturing production down, it is challenging once untouchable professions. No need to see an accountant, lawyer, or doctor for your every need. Just use Turbo Tax, download legal forms from the Web, or use medical Internet sites to do some self-diagnosis.

The bottom line according to Pink? “Now that knowledge workers overseas can do left-brain cheaper, we’ve got to do right-brain better.” His research identified six aptitudes he believes future success will require (see sidebar). The challenge for many individuals, particularly those owing their past success to left-brain skills, is that their right-brain muscles have atrophied and become weak. But Pink is confident that with a bit of a workout, everyone can develop the qualities the Conceptual Era prioritizes.

Impact on Meetings

What does the Conceptual Era potentially mean for meetings? Many professions and industries offer abundant professional development opportunities that compete for potential registrants’ time and money.

Future success may well depend not only on a high-quality meeting at a fair cost (a left-brain given), but also on a meeting that is better designed, offers a compelling story, and provides more meaning for attendees. In addition, your efforts may provide just the fitness regimen to help your attendees develop the right-brain aptitudes Pink believes even the most left-brain professions will require.

Pink suggests our well-developed high-tech abilities must be complemented by high concept and high touch aptitudes: “High concept involves the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to come up with inventions the world didn’t know it was missing. High touch involves the capacity to empathize, to understand the

subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one's self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning.”

So, a more right-brain meeting of the future might be one that ...

- Offers less “delivered” content and allocates more time for attendees to discuss and draw meaning from the information presented.
- Leverages the power of design and provides compelling visuals that engage participants’ attention, not only in marketing materials, but in handouts and worksheets created to enhance the learning experience. Printing out PowerPoint slides won’t cut it.
- Draws on relevant content outside from the specific industry or profession to create a more interdisciplinary learning experience, connecting attendees to content they might not otherwise access.
- Builds in playful moments that recharge participants’ passion and enthusiasm for their work, as well as strengthens the community they share with their colleagues.
- Promotes itself not just through standard bullet points, but weaves its benefits and facts about the program into a compelling story that engages attendees’ attention and provides more meaning.
- Offers content that helps participants develop their interpersonal skills so they can be more effective professionals regardless of their chosen vocation.
- Weaves the power of design through every element of the learning experience, ensuring that every component is not only functional, but also intentionally crafted to deliver more value.
- Helps individuals develop empathy to the increasing diversity present among their professional colleagues, as well as their members and customers.

Your Future Success

While our focus may shift to the right side of the brain in the near future, it is important to note that Pink stresses a whole new mind. Success in the future is not only tied to right-brain aptitudes. You still must demonstrate a mastery of left-brain skills. While those alone may once have guaranteed success, they now only put you in the running.

You’ll need to use your left-brain skills to ensure the meeting is organized efficiently and provides cost-effective value. You will also tap into your right-brain aptitudes to envision more compelling ways of facilitating learning and community. Who would have thought that the somewhat schizophrenic days of meetings professionals would portend what the future might hold for everyone looking to get ahead?

Not just function but also design.

Not just argument but also story.

Not just focus but also symphony.

Not just logic but also empathy.

Not just seriousness but also play.

Not just accumulation but also meaning.

Source: Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age by Dan Pink. Riverhead Books, 2005

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