

Leading for Safer and More Civil Work Environments

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Do you take the time to say hello to coworkers? Do you return a smile? Research by authors such as Lynne Andersson and Christine Pearson, 1999, *Tit for Tat? The Spiraling Effect of Incivility in the Workplace*, confirms if you don't you are potentially contributing to the genesis of uncivil behavior. Incivility ranges from not saying hello to others to committing acts of violence. Most alarming is the increasing rate of incivility, especially in utility and construction environments. It is hoped that this article contributes to reversing this trend by focusing on leadership from a safety frame of reference.

According to the May, 2013 Security Director's Report from the Institute of Finance and Management, *How Will You Stem the Tide of Workplace Incivility (And Worse)?*, incivility has gotten worse especially for utilities, the construction and mining industries who rank second to the government and public administration sector as portrayed in Table 1 - Rate of Incivility.

Table 1. Rate of Incivility

Industry/Sector	Change in Physical Violence Between Coworkers
#1. Government/Public Administration	Up 46% over 2012
#2. Utility, Construction, Natural Resources and Mining	Up 20% over 2012
	Change in Harassment, Threats & Abuse Between Employees
#1. Government/Public Administration	Up 55% over 2012
#2. Utility, Construction, Natural Resources and Mining	Up 33% over 2012

The statistics are alarming and an important safety concern. How crews get along is an important attribute of safe work environments. Arguing and talking to others in attempt to win support for one's position and is often based on how workers are treated. On several occasions as a former electric lineman, manager, and utility director I have witnessed seemingly innocent behavior spiral to revenge seeking and violence. As a utility consultant I hear about this type of situation regularly.

From a safety perspective, uncivil behavior is a significant distraction that ultimately leads to accidents. In my view, leadership style of supervisory personnel is the primary contributor to civil or uncivil workplaces. It's not enough to have a policy that details acceptable behavior. In fact the Institute of Finance and Management's survey shows just the opposite. Policies actually

increase the incidence of incivility. In my opinion, what is needed is leadership founded on collaboration. To further clarify I offer this hypothesis:

Adopting an inclusive leadership style will engender more civil work environments and provide a positive influence on safety.

Background on Leadership Style

Dating back to Hippocrates, physicians believed that the left side of man’s body was the most important half. After all, the left side is where the heart is located. In general left-brain thinking is associated with analytical thinking, whereas right-brain thinking is associated with creative thinking as shown in Table 2 - Traits of the Brain. Our society is largely developed by left-brain thinking. Power lines, bridges, the military, highways, our homes, cars, city planning, etc. all require significant analytical skills first and creative skills second. Not surprisingly, interpersonal relationships were heavily influenced by the same left-brain one right answer approach – I am right; therefore you must be wrong.

Table 2 - Traits of the Brain

For decades society labeled leadership with *I’ll save the day* type attitudes that naturally promoted behaviors focused on being number one. We learned this *me-first* thinking beginning in kindergarten. You might recall competing with your kindergarten classmates by raising your hand as fast as possible in order to be the first to answer the teacher’s question. In many cases we didn’t have the answer but that didn’t matter; being first was most important. As we grew, *me-first* thinking was further sustained by sports figures who without them, their teams certainly would not succeed. If that weren’t enough to engrain *me-*

Category	Traits of the Analytical Left Brain	Traits of the Behavioral Right Brain
		
Speed	Slow	Quick
Skill Attainment	Efficiently associates new information via neural connections.	Laborious requiring extended practice, feedback, and motivation.
Thinking	Analytical, logical, and sequential. Converges to a single answer.	Feelings, impulses, and drives. Interprets emotional content.
Focus	Concentrates on details.	Sees the big picture.
Body Control	Right.	Left.

first thinking, the media further secured our thinking that leadership is a trait that only some have such as John Wayne, Hercules, Chuck Norris, etc. (did you notice the absence of women?). This *great man* theory of leadership summarily dismisses followers. In fact, chances are you consider followers to be something less than leaders. If so, keep reading!

Today, one cannot be an effective leader without first understanding what it is to be a follower. To lead is to influence others in achieving organizational objectives; to follow is to work to support leaders by asking questions, providing resources, finding things to thank a leader for, and not criticizing leaders publicly. Both leaders and followers share traits such as honesty, dependability, and competence. How can one empathize with subordinate followers if they have never paid attention to what effective followers do? What I am describing is the *great collaborator* style of leadership as the antithesis of the great man style of leadership.

To appreciate the power followers have, all we have to do is look at countries such as Libya and Egypt where followers used the new found power of social media to bring down entire countries. In like fashion employees and customers are exerting the same power on organizations. Just go to YouTube or Twitter and search for some rants about a company!

My research in 2006 found the same inattention to followers at the organizational level with utilities. The research, *Assessment of Public Sector Electric Utilities Employees Readiness for Changeⁱ*, measured concerns for change of management and non-management employees as a measure of readiness for change. Statistically significant differences were found regarding employees concerns for how industry change would affect their job (*task* concerns) and how their utility would be affected (*impact* concerns). Whether at the national or organizational level, the research is clear;

in order to create a more civil organizational climate and in the long-term culture, management personnel must lead in a way that impacts the human dimension.

You might be asking yourself why this shift is happening. Writers such as Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*, contend as we grow richer, as technology becomes more powerful, and as the world becomes more connected we are nudged into a new era. Just like moving from the Agrarian to the Industrial Age we now find ourselves in the Conceptual Age. The Conceptual Age, as shown in Table 3 – Evolution of Thinking is characteristic of a movement away from linear, left-braininess, to one that yearns for things that are right-brained such as spirituality, emotion, and creativeness. To Pink the Conceptual Age is synonymous with the ability to empathize (High Touch) and to detect emotional beauty and behavioral patterns (High Concept).

Author Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, further documented society's adoption of more right-directed thinking. Goleman examined several studies on the connection between intelligence (IQ) and career success. He found IQ only accounted for 4-10% of career success; it was emotional intelligence (EQ) that more accurately predicted success. Emotional intelligence is associated with the brain's limbic system that governs feelings, impulses, drive, and the ability to empathize.

The movement from left to right-directed thinking has stimulated the desire for right-brained things that work to keep us calm and to find greater meaning in life. More of us are joining churches, pausing to see the beauty in things that heretofore would not have captured our senses,

and we work harder at building relationships. Why else would candles be a multibillion dollar business and growing when we have electric light bulbs? Why are more people volunteering to help those in need? Why are organizations clamoring for people who know how to build relationships?

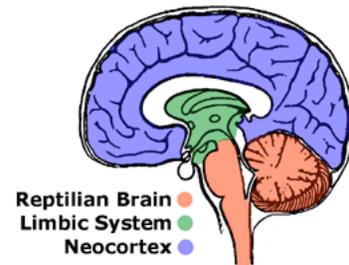
Table 3 – Evolution of Thinking

	<i>Industrial Age</i>	<i>Knowledge Age</i>	<i>Conceptual Age</i>
	Left to Right Thinking 		
Leadership	Top-Down. <u>Manage</u> people like we do equipment.	Some Bottom-Up. <u>Lead</u> people with respect for their voice.	Bottom-Up. Lead people with high-touch.
People	<i>Great Man</i> Manufacturing – work with hands.	“Mentalfactoring” – work with mind.	<i>Great Collaborator</i> Work holistically with empathy.
Organizational Climate - Employee attitude.	Employees’ lack of initiative & formal leader’s “control” orientation fuels each other.	Employees are willing to question others - focus is optimization.	Employees work to master high-touch aptitude to deepen relationships with colleagues.

Left to Right – Implications for Leading

Unfortunately, many still think of safety as left brain process where the proper equipment is used so as to eliminate an accident from happening. Safety leadership training follows this step-wise rationale by targeting the thinking brain (neo-cortex). Therefore, safety efforts continue to focus on ways to ensure workers use the appropriate safety equipment for the job. Worse, the industry rests content knowing it has done all it can to prevent accidents....or has it? Despite decades of effort on electric lineman safety as represented by power line construction companies and electric utilities, the electric power industry is one of the top ten most dangerous industries according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012). What is going on? Has the industry slipped into a mindset of accident homeostasis? Is the attitude one of *Well, it is dangerous work; therefore... (Insert your own words)*. I finish the sentence with *higher level thinking skills are needed*. Specifically, understanding accidents are for the most part, not due to equipment malfunctions but to the imbalanced thinking of supervisory personnel and their subordinates.

The Evolution-Designed Brain



In my opinion, leaders who rely primarily on *great man* (left-brain) leadership can increase their ability to influence by adopting *great collaborator* (right brain) traits. Like all things in life, balance is crucial and leadership is no different. Work environments and safety will be positively

impacted to the extent leaders engage both hemispheres of the brain. Those charged with leading others can achieve a more balanced approach by strengthening their EQ in order to better manage their emotions; improve their ability to empathize with others, communicate more effectively, and defuse conflict.

Application of More “Right-Directed” Leadership

Several organizations provide wonderful examples of the power of engaging right-brain thinking. Starbucks embarked in research on how they could teach employees to regulate their emotions and strengthen their self-discipline. The findings from the research were used in the development of an employee training program that has been credited with turning several troubled employees around. The program teaches life skills such as how to focus, how to get to work on time, and how to master emotions. In researching the science of willpower the University of Albany found some students are able to self-discipline better than others. The researchers wanted to know what caused the difference and found it was how the students were treated. Those that exhibited greater self-control were those that had a greater sense of control over their experience.

To learn more about EQ see publications such as: *Primal Leadership* by Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee; *Leading Change* by John Kotter; *The Cost of Bad Behavior* by Christine Pearson and Cristine Porath; *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel Pink; and *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman. For now, refer to Table 4 and 5 – The Non-Crisis Leadership/Work Environment/Safety Connection for concise recommendations for enriching your leadership ability and how to apply right directed thinking in the workplace. Please consider the tables as recommendations and not an exhaustive plan for becoming a more balanced leader.

Table 4 – The Non-Crisis Leadership/Work Environment/Safety Connection

	<i>Imbalanced Approach</i>	<i>Balanced Approach</i>
Leadership Training	<p>Focus on leadership styles only.</p> <p><i>Thinking</i> - to lead is to manage; therefore, engaging the appropriate style is all that is needed to lead effectively.</p> <p>There are several models such as Hersey and Blanchard’s Situation Theory – Telling, Selling, Participating, and Delegating.</p> <p>Note: During times of crisis, i.e., power outage, authoritarian leadership styles such as Telling is often appropriate and effective.</p>	<p>Focus is on both leadership styles and emotional intelligence.</p> <p><i>Thinking</i> – to lead is to influence; therefore, honing one’s ability to manage emotions is a requisite for whatever leadership style is used.</p> <p>EQ Traits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Self-Awareness ✓ Self-Control ✓ Social Awareness ✓ Relationship Management

Table 5 – The Non-Crisis Leadership/Work Environment/Safety Connection

Application of Balanced Leadership Training		
<i>Situation</i>	<i>Imbalanced Approach</i>	<i>Balanced Approach</i>
<p>First day on job. ✓ New people, new location, new boss, new company...</p>	<p>No recognition of the feelings of the crews. Little time is devoted to learn backgrounds, to listen to potential concerns and desires.</p> <p><i>Result</i> - pent-up feelings by subordinates serve as distraction and inattention to work results.</p>	<p>Significant time is devoted to providing crews <i>voice</i>.</p> <p><i>Result</i> - personal needs are less apt to serve as a distraction and attention to work is strengthened.</p>
<p>During workday ✓ A new day brings different circumstances and the need for continual dialogue</p>	<p>No time taken to continue providing subordinate voice.</p> <p><i>Result</i> – self talk gains power in controlling behavior. Boss’s silence must mean <i>I am not accepted</i>. Chances are taken in order to prove oneself.</p>	<p>Opportunities are sought to engage subordinates to talk about anxieties, fears, desires, and career.</p> <p><i>Result</i> – helps ensure risk is minimized by working to uncover deep seeded issues.</p>
<p>Rewards/Recognition ✓ As motivator of good behavior</p>	<p>Pay check is primary reward. Queue the left brain again!</p> <p><i>Result</i> – pay checks are expected; as such they are not motivators of behavior change.</p>	<p>Intrinsic rewards such as a pat on the back and/or recognizing an employee publically are powerful means of influence.</p> <p><i>Result</i> – one’s sense of belonging is strengthened and proving oneself is less of a distraction.</p>

The Power of Right-Brain Engagement

The prisoner said he joined a hate group because after 5 years of refusal they sent him birthday cards

Discovery “Hate on Trial” [Television series episode].
March 20th, 2000.

Caught in the CrossHairs

“One reason we see so many coaches not being effective is that they’re knowledgeable in only one area – X’s and O’s. There is very little training in areas such as moral and emotional intelligence, and both are important.” Minneapolis Star Tribune – February 13, 2007

Uncivil behavior exists in all industries and to a large extent is the result of leadership that relies on outdated practices. The days of telling people what to do as John Wayne would do as a great man have long past. Today, leading requires above average ability to influence others in order to build cohesive teams. Addressing uncivil behavior is especially important to the power line industry given its unforgiving nature of risk. The good news is uncivil behavior can be reduced by engaging more right-brained thinking as a counter balance to often used practices of the left brain. Right brain thinking is referred to as emotional intelligence (EQ) and as research confirmed, it is EQ not IQ that more accurately predicts leadership success. Finally, it is my view that a more balanced leadership approach will reduce workplace incivility and create organizational climates that are safer.

This article sought to inform you about the link between leadership style and civility and safe work environments. Traits of the left and right brain were explained in context of leadership styles. Leadership style was related to the need for balance between intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ). Recommendations were provided for applying balanced leadership in the workplace – with your crews. With regard to application, how to change one’s leadership habit was not covered, but is hugely important. Do you think an article on changing habits, i.e., *Changing Leadership Styles: A Matter of Habit*, would be valuable? Let me know by emailing me at jimw@poweroflearning.org.

Author

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ⁱ Walters, J. (2006). *Assessment of Public Sector Electric Utilities Employees Readiness for Change*. http://books.google.com/books/about/Assessment_of_Public_Sector_Electric_Uti.html?id=Z_kWOAAACA
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