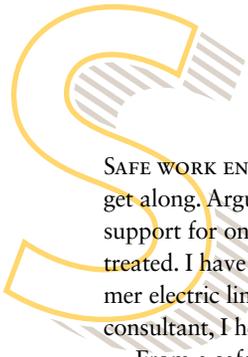




# LEADING

## FOR SAFER AND MORE CIVIL WORK ENVIRONMENTS

BY JIM WALTERS, EdD, OWNER, POWER OF LEARNING INC.



SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENTS OFTEN DEPEND ON HOW CREWS get along. Arguing and talking to others in an attempt to win support for one’s position is often based on how a worker is treated. I have witnessed uncivil work environments as a former electric lineman, manager and utility director. As a utility consultant, I hear about this type of situation often.

From a safety perspective, uncivil behavior is a significant distraction that ultimately can lead to accidents. In my view, leadership style of supervisory personnel is the primary contributor to civil or uncivil workplaces. To further clarify, I offer this hypothesis:

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

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## BACKGROUND ON LEADERSHIP STYLES

Dating back to Hippocrates, physicians believed that the left side of the 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 1—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.

For decades society labeled leadership with I’ll save the day 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 up, me-first thinking was further sustained by sports figures—

without them, their teams certainly would not succeed. If that weren’t enough to engrain me-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!

## TRAITS OF THE BRAIN

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 an organization’s 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,

TABLE 1.

## TRAITS OF THE BRAIN

	TRAITS OF THE ANALYTICAL LEFT BRAIN	TRAITS OF THE ANALYTICAL 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

TABLE 2.

## EVOLUTION OF THINKING

	INDUSTRIAL AGE	KNOWLEDGE AGE	CONCEPTUAL AGE
LEADERSHIP	<b>GREAT MAN</b> Top-down, <b>manage</b> people like we do equipment.	Some bottom-up, <b>lead</b> people with respect for their voice.	<b>GREAT COLLABORATOR</b> Bottom-up, lead people with high touch.
PEOPLE	Manufacturing—work with hands	“Mentalfacturing”—work with mind	Work holistically with empathy
EMPLOYEE ATTITUDE	Employees’ lack of initiative and formal leader’s “control” orientation fuel each other.	Employees are willing to question others—focus is optimization.	Employees work to master high-touch aptitude to deepen relationships with colleagues.

citizens, voiced their displeasure with the aid of social media and brought down the government. 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!

You might be asking yourself why this shift is happening. Writers such as Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*, contend that as we grow richer, as technology becomes more powerful and as the world becomes more connected, we are nudged into a new era. As with the move from the Agrarian to the Industrial Age, we now find ourselves in the Conceptual Age. The Conceptual Age, as shown in Table 2—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).

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## EVOLUTION OF THINKING

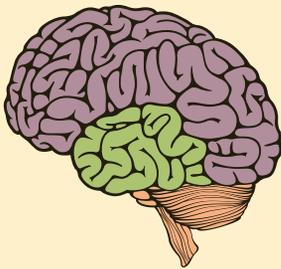
Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence, further documented society's adoption of more right-directed thinking. Goleman examined several studies on the connection between intelligence (IQ) and career success. He found that IQ accounted for only 4–10% of career success; it was emotional intelligence (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?

### THE EVOLUTION-DESIGNED BRAIN



- The Reptilian Brain
- The Limbic System
- The Neocortex

## LEFT TO RIGHT: IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADING

Unfortunately, many still think of safety as a left-brain process where the proper equipment is used so as to stop 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 that 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 10 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 that accidents are for the most part not caused by equipment



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TABLE 3.

## LEADERSHIP TRAINING

IMBALANCED APPROACH	BALANCED APPROACH
<p>Focus is only on leadership styles.</p> <p><b>THINKING</b> To lead is to <b>manage</b>; therefore, engaging the appropriate style is all that is needed to lead effectively.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLES</b> There are several models, including Hersey and Blanchard's Situation Theory—Telling, Selling, Participating, and Delegating.</p> <p><b>NOTE</b> During times of crisis—i.e., power outage—authoritarian leadership styles such as Telling are often appropriate and effective.</p>	<p>Focus is on both leadership styles and emotional intelligence.</p> <p><b>THINKING</b> To lead is to <b>influence</b>; therefore, honing one's ability to manage emotions is a requisite for whatever leadership style is used.</p> <p><b>EQ TRAITS</b> Self-awareness Self-control Social awareness Relationship management</p>

malfunctions but by the imbalanced thinking of supervisory personnel and their subordinates.

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. As with all things in life, balance is crucial—and leadership is no different. Work environments and safety will be positively affected to the extent that leaders engage both hemispheres of the brain. Those charged with leading others can achieve a more balanced approach by strengthening their EQ 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 on research on how it 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 that some students are able to self-discipline better than others. The researchers wanted to know what caused the difference and found that it was how

the students were treated. Those who exhibited greater self-control had a greater sense of control over their experience.

### THE NON-CRISIS LEADERSHIP/WORK ENVIRONMENT/SAFETY CONNECTION

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 that uncivil behavior can be reduced by engaging more right-brained thinking as a counterbalance to often used practices of the left brain. Right-brained thinking is referred to as emotional intelligence (EQ), and as research has confirmed, it is EQ and 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.

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 Tables 3 and 4—Leadership Training and Application of Balanced Leadership Training for concise recommendations on enriching your leadership ability and how to apply right-directed thinking in the workplace. Consider the tables as recommendations and not an exhaustive plan for becoming a more balanced leader. **EE**

*Jim Walters, EdD, is a former electric lineman and current owner of Power of Learning Inc. He provides employee development services in the areas of safety, customer service, and interpersonal communication. His company focuses on the electric power industry. He graduated from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota with a doctorate of education in leadership and received an MBA from the University of Dubuque. Reach him at jimw@poweroflearning.org or http://poweroflearning.org.*

### WANT MORE ON LEADERSHIP?

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.

TABLE 4.

# APPLICATION OF BALANCED LEADERSHIP TRAINING

SITUATION	IMBALANCED APPROACH	BALANCED APPROACH
<p><b>FIRST DAY ON JOB</b> New people, new location, new boss, new company, etc.</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><b>RESULT</b> = Pent-up feelings by subordinates serve as distraction and inattention to work results.</p>	<p>Significant time is devoted to providing crews voice.</p> <p><b>RESULT</b> = Personal needs are less apt to serve as a distraction, and attention to work is strengthened.</p>
<p><b>DURING WORKDAY</b> A new day brings different circumstances and the need for continual dialogue</p>	<p>No time taken to continue providing subordinate voice.</p> <p><b>RESULT</b> = Self-talk gains power in controlling behavior. Boss's silence must mean I am not accepted. Chances are taken to prove oneself.</p>	<p>Opportunities are sought to engage subordinates to talk about anxieties, fears, desires, and career.</p> <p><b>RESULT</b> = Helps ensure that risk is minimized by working to uncover deep-seated problems.</p>
<p><b>REWARDS &amp; RECOGNITION</b> As a motivator of good behavior</p>	<p>Paycheck is primary reward. Cue the left brain again!</p> <p><b>RESULT</b> = Paychecks 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 publicly are powerful means of influence.</p> <p><b>RESULT</b> = One's sense of belonging is strengthened, and proving oneself is less of a distraction.</p>



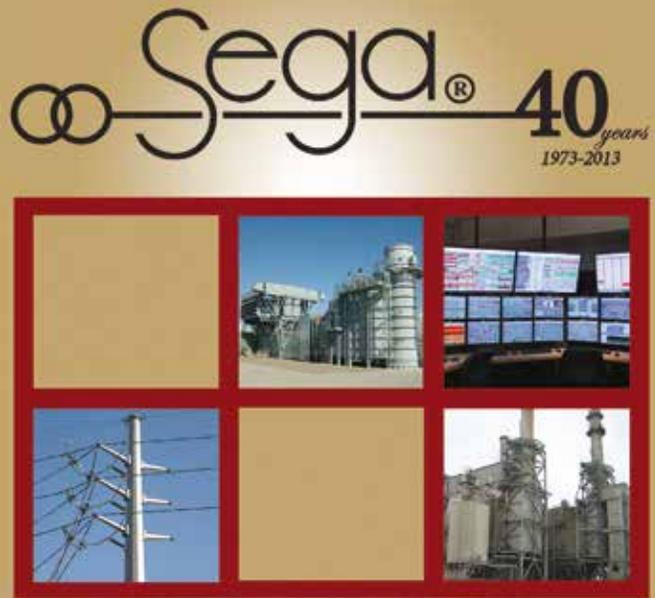
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