

# Change Does Cause Pain



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## The Neuroscience of Leadership

Do you have a workload that is staggering at times? Do you wonder what to tackle first? Then you decide to tackle your priority items. You concentrate on that work and guess what? It gets done. It makes sense, what you pay attention to is what gets done. And, it stands to reason that what you don't pay attention to does not get done.

This applies to your leadership skills as well. You need to pay attention to them not only so they grow, but so they become second nature. In a recent article by David Rock and Jeffrey Schwartz in *Strategy + Business* magazine, they refer to this as "Attention Density; Repeated, purposeful and focused attention which leads to long lasting personal evolution."

The premise of the article, aptly titled *The Neuroscience of Leadership*, is that change is difficult for everyone. In fact it is painful. Rock and Schwartz go on to say "...trying to change a routine behavior sends out strong messages in the brain that something is not right. These messages grab the individual's attention, and they can readily overpower rational thought." So, are we bound to these physiological laws? Can we create change that is not so painful? The answer is yes.

Rock and Schwartz provide two key insights to facilitating less painful change in ourselves as well as others. One of the methods that Rock and Schwartz demonstrate to change behavior patterns is through "Attention Density". This method suggests that the more you concentrate, not on the behavior you want to change, but on the new behavior you want to create, it will reduce the *amygdale* "fear response" which is deeply programmed into the oldest part of our brains. This is in fact the same part of the brain that is also responsible for sensing pain.

In the case of developing leadership qualities in ones-self the Attention Density method directly supports Dr. James Farr's second quality of a great leader: To be a great leader, you must present your "leaderself" to others, rather than your

natural self. Good leaders do not always do what comes as a natural expression of their personalities. Instead, they present a "leaderself" that is designed and created to do exactly the leadership behavior called for by the situation. These actions can take significant concentration or as Rock and Schwartz put it, "Attention Density" in order to be consistent in the leadership actions that you *need* to present to be most effective. And like most things, the more you do something the more natural and less painful it becomes.

When we look to create change in others, Rock and Schwartz's research suggests a second method to facilitate change. You have often heard that the best way to get to "yes" or create "buy-in" is not by telling, but by asking questions. Well, it turns out there is actually a neurological reason for this. According to Rock and Schwartz, "... findings suggest that at the moment of insight, a complex set of new connections is being created (in the brain). These connections have the potential to enhance our mental resources and overcome the brain's resistance to change."

Insight, that "ah ha" moment, where a light goes on. And, it of course goes on, because **you** came up with the answer. It is at this moment that change is no longer so difficult to overcome. There is literally a "rush" that helps fight against the fear of change when people feel they have come up with or realized the answer on their own. Though this concept may not be new, the fact that we now know there is actually a physiological reason and not just an "ego" reason to resist change is important.

So how do we help create this moment of insight in others to better facilitate change? Dr. James Farr would suggest that his first quality of a great leader would provide us the answer: You must have the skill to gain insight into the follower's mind concerning his situation and how he perceives you. In particular, you must know what they perceive as negative. A skilled leader can break down any reluctance to get feedback by supporting

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the efforts of followers to work in a way that satisfies both themselves and their company. Getting this feedback is a way to help create that "Ah ha" moment where workers provide solutions and ideas that have been solicited by leaders. Though the feedback may be guided towards certain results as long as the worker sees it as their idea or contribution the idea will be more accepted. This exciting research shows the physiological reasons that change can be so difficult. It has also shown that there are clear techniques, such as the ones offered by Dr. Farr that can help minimize the pain felt by the effects of change.