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## **Balanced-Brain Thinking In A Left-Brain World**

by *Brian Thwaites*

I had the great pleasure this past May of speaking at the OIAA Out-of-Town Meeting in Kingston. My presentation was called *Train Your Brain* and focused on how we can use our brains better, faster and smarter.

The way we use our brains has everything to do with everything we do! It has a huge impact on both our personal and professional lives, affecting the way we think, learn, remember, and solve problems. And it influences our lives and the work we do in profound ways. It makes a tremendous impression, for instance, on how we deal with our day-to-day tasks, market our services, give presentations, handle customer service and communicate with others.

Scientists learned more about how our brains function in the 1990s (the Decade of the Brain) than they ever knew before. One of the things they've discovered is that the left and right sides of our brains process completely different kinds of information in completely different ways. As it turns out, the left side (which deals with words, numbers, facts, etc.) is like the most boring person you've ever met — and the right side (which deals with emotion, colour, music, etc.) is like the best party you've ever been to!

Over the years, I've made a great many 'brain training' keynote presentations at conferences. I've also been involved in in-service training programs with a variety of organizations, and part of my sessions involve the administration of a test to determine which side of each participant's brain is the dominant one. One group I worked with recently was made up of employees who'd been involved in accidents and had been moved to a certain department to do light work that wasn't too physically or mentally demanding. It made sense that every single person in this group tested as right-brain thinkers because, as one of them put it, "We're dreamers. We don't have much to concentrate on, so our imaginations are always roaming."

Well, you know, it's really too bad that more of us don't have that kind of opportunity to just let our minds drift more often. Too many of us these days are walking around with our heads leaning way over to the left! In fact, here are the top three complaints I hear these days from businesspeople:

1. I have too much to do.
2. I don't have enough time to do it.
3. Things are changing too fast.

And the result of these issues is that we get so bogged down with details that we often deny ourselves the opportunity to live more complete, fulfilling lives. And much of that problem is associated with the way we use our brains.

We live in a culture that very much values — perhaps overvalues — left-brain thinking. In school, if you proved that you were good with logic and reason and analysis, you were able to achieve good marks and survive your educational experience. Later on, you used those same left-brain strengths to realize success in the workplace. Unfortunately, though, these accomplishments have been attained at the expense of the many fascinating features of the other — more fun — side of the brain.

The truly *smart* — and I'd even go so far as to say *happy* — beings among us have learned to balance their brains. They've identified their weak sides (usually the right) and worked at further developing the skills that don't necessarily come naturally to them. Two examples: Albert Einstein was a whiz at physics (left side) but loved to play the violin (right side). Winston Churchill made powerful speeches (left side), but he also enjoyed painting landscape scenes (right side). Because of each of these individuals' ability to temper one type of brainpower with the other, both were considerably more accomplished and successful than the average human being.

We popped out of the womb with both sides of the brain working as a team. Young children exhibit balanced-brain thinking every single day, learning logic through play. (Have you ever heard kids described as "learning sponges"?) It's too bad that years of school and work, with their attendant emphasis on often excruciatingly boring left-brain skills, have slowly but surely robbed us of much of that healthy balance.

So here's the deal: If you have a job that involves facts, facts and more facts, try to find some other things to do that will free up your imagination. Read fiction. Listen to music more often. Dance! If your occupation is more on the creative side, then go sign up for a number-crunching course. Be proud of your strengths, but also work on your weaknesses.

At the very least, you'll look better with your head perfectly balanced on the top of your shoulders!