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It's not a logical and linear, left-brain world any more

WOMEN AT WORK

Sally Ward

Routine is the evil word of the 21st century. Just ask Dan Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*.

Pink says left-brain abilities (those that are logical, sequential or linear) are necessary, but aren't enough to sustain individual and business success in a changing economy. Powerful forces in the new economy demand that we cultivate right-brained abilities such as inventiveness, multi-tasking, artistry and empathy.

U.S prosperity has tripled since 1950 but as a society we're not one bit happier. Pink calls this the abundance gap and says it means we're living in a "significance economy." Those in the middle class and upward are engaged in a search for meaning and purpose.

Think of the implications for business. Product and service offerings must not only offer benefits but also touch an emotional chord. Employers must communicate to prospective hires and staff how they will be able to make a mark in the organization. As Guy Kawasaki, former guru at Apple Computer, observed: "If you can make meaning, you will probably make money."

Forward-thinking leaders and organizations are challenging the routine and adopting out-of-the-box thinking to survive and thrive. The Clinton Family Health Center in Rochester found that the traditional advance appointment model consistently yielded only a 50 percent rate for appointments kept. The center jettisoned that model in favor of a fast-service model like McDonald's, which is client-centric. Director James Sutton notes the remarkable results: "All appointments are now scheduled same day. The percentage of appointments kept has shot up from 50 percent to 95 to 98 percent."

For the health center's leaders, thinking out of the box meant challenging the assumption that advance bookings were necessary to accurately predict staffing demands. By making

services more convenient, they increased the meaning and relevance to clients, reaping the benefit in productivity.

To thrive in a significance economy, Pink lists six essential right-brain abilities:

Design. Function is no longer enough. As an example, a flat screen TV offers entertainment presented as modern wall art.

Story. Facts and rationale are necessary but inadequate by themselves. Businesses and organizations must also tell a story that delivers emotional impact and shows how what they did made a difference.

Symphony. Big-picture thinking is the key skill for leaders and leading organizations. The most effective leader is like the orchestra director who visualizes the end result and brings all parts of the whole together to achieve it.

Empathy. Logic is important; empathy is irreplaceable. It cannot be automated or outsourced. Logic says that medical clinics must run by advance appointment in order to staff properly. Empathy looks at what clients want.

Play. Play renews people and inspires creativity. Opportunities to share successes, engage in friendly competition and socialize can prime the pump for increased engagement and fresh thinking.

Meaning. Managers must let each member of a team know the importance of his or her role and how it helps to fulfill the mission. This does not happen without conscious intent and commitment. I've heard many complaints from people who didn't feel appreciated enough, but never one from someone who felt appreciated too much.

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