



Amanda Gore's
Monthly Endorphin Injection!

"The Joy of Change" by Amanda Gore

“Problems cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them” --Albert Einstein

It seems an oxymoron to put joy and change in the same sentence – a short sentence at that! But this is my next mission – to help people understand that change is possible and can be joyful. We know change is the only constant in today's world of complexity and chaos, and that the bulk of a leader's job is to facilitate changes in people's behaviors.

The good news is that research in a field called neuroplasticity has become popular and proves that we CAN change! We are not hard wired. A leopard CAN change its spots. Well, maybe a leopard can't, but we can!

Essentially, neuroplasticity describes the brain's ability to set up new connections – everything in life is about connections, at a brain and heart level.

THE BRAIN LEVEL- AND THE POWER OF FOCUS AND ATTENTION

I somehow knew this when I was 23 and practicing as a new, enthusiastic, and excited physical therapist. I was working in the neurological ward and I have no idea how I knew this, but I did!

I used to explain to my stroke patients that the first time they managed to control or regain an isolated movement, a tiny scratch would be etched on their brain. Each time they repeated this movement or action the scratch would become deeper and deeper until it was so deep that the movement became automatic and at that point, they did not have to think and work incredibly hard to make their toe move. Initially they had to focus very hard and pay extreme attention to every aspect of the movement. It had to be a very conscious brain effort.

This is in essence what neuroplasticity says – VERY simplistically! If we focus our brain's attention on what it is we want to change and repeat it frequently, we can make new connections and lay down new pathways.

The more we do it, the easier it becomes, until finally we don't even have to think about doing it – it is automatic.

As an aside, if we continually focus on the negative aspects of anything, those connections and neural pathways are reinforced – until they become your automatic response – you don't even know you are officially a pessimist! Pay attention to what you focus on in life – the good or the bad. If it's the bad/difficult/ struggles/ down sides of things – today is the day to re-hardware your brain by consciously focusing on the positive, optimistic side of everything.

THE MORE YOU DO IT, THE BETTER YOU ARE AT IT

An accountant has a bigger, more connected brain in the area of formulae and numbers than I do! A surgeon has a highly developed dexterity part of the brain. A great salesperson has a huge 'relationship corner'! A jeweler has exceptional eyesight and precision hand movements. In other words, if you have spent a long time learning about and practicing a skill, your brain will have different 'lumps and bumps' from someone who specialized in another area!

Remember, I said this was simplistic, but the essence of it is correct.

THE HEART LEVEL- THE KEY IS EMOTIONAL CONNECTION AND AN 'AH HA' MOMENT!

What really worked back when I was 23 was what I unknowingly did at a heart level. The excitement and enthusiasm I felt for, and showed my patients at any little change, and my belief and absolute faith they would be able to do it, was what transformed them. It motivated them to keep going and keep trying – it touched their hearts and my faith made them feel they could do it.

Change is all about how people feel about themselves and what they believe they can do – and what is in it for them to change.

I believe we can change in a heartbeat given the right conditions and context. Think of times in your life when you have made an instant decision – and it changed the way you did things from that minute.

Think back in your life to a time when you made such a change. Often the decision to make that change comes in a heartbeat. Because you had an 'ah ha' moment which I believe is a moment of revelation in your heart. If we try to change just from our brains, it takes 60-90 days for a change to stick and we have to repeat it a lot!

Making judgments about people is part of the human condition – one we need to overcome – and are often a good example of changing in a heartbeat. How many times have you privately judged someone only to find out something about them that made you feel instant shame that you thought what you thought? And you changed – your perception, feelings and actions. We never know the truth about anyone else unless we have walked in their shoes.

People will begin a change process when they FEEL – in their heart - they want to change. They hate it when other people impose change on them, force them to change, or tell them how to change! For them to own the change and make it joyful, they have to emotionally connect with some aspect of the process and have an 'ah ha' moment in which they realize the value of the change for them personally. The 'what's in it for me if I change' component.

Lou Gerstner, when he was turning IBM around, discovered that facts and figures did not work! He found he had to go out, speak with all the people at IBM and literally and metaphorically 'touch' everyone in the company – he had to inspire them emotionally to embrace the change and drive it. He wanted them to be proud of what they did and also of the company.

LEARNING

If we want someone to do something different, we have to give them enough information, knowledge and training to feel supported and confident that they can do what is being asked of them. Learning makes a huge difference.

It is also the way to keep our brains young and vital; and not just simple stuff – we have to learn things that are completely different or something we have never done before.

Even before I learned about this, I had always had a dream to play the harp. I loved harp music but knew nothing about music. I only learned the recorder at school and I hated that which turned me off music forever! Until my Mum died.

From the money she left me, I bought a harp and was blessed to find an extraordinary teacher in Vermont. She is a saint. I want you to picture this – a 53 year old woman who has never played a musical instrument before who keeps asking 'what are the little dots on the lines' - who didn't know

what a flat or a melody was! I was blessed that Linda teaches in an exquisite way that allows parts of my brain to activate unconsciously and yet, the lessons are exhausting! All that totally new learning gobbles up oxygen and glucose as my prefrontal cortex – the part you use to learn new things – is working overtime. That is why many of us find change so uncomfortable – because of the energy expenditure to keep the prefrontal cortex fed while it processes and learns and makes new connections.

It's amazing how tired I am at the end of just sitting in one spot trying to coordinate 3000 things that she does effortlessly and brilliantly! She sounds fabulous. I sound different!

LETTING GO OF JUDGMENT

But that led me to the second lesson – that judging ourselves often blocks our learning and capacity to change! We need to become aware of our perceptions and beliefs about ourselves, as they shape our reality. Experiences and truth don't shape our reality – our preconceptions, expectations and judgments determine our perceptions, which determine our reality!

What we expect to happen, and what really happen are often very different things. Two prominent scientists in the field of neuroscience and leadership – David Rock and Jeffrey Schwartz – wrote a wonderful article on much of this in the summer 2006 edition of *Strategy and Business* titled *The Neuroscience of Leadership*. It's worth reading if you are interested in leading people effectively through change.

Reading this sparked some ideas in me about reprogramming a computer. If we just delete some information in a computer, a 'black hole' is left! We need to replace that deleted or changed program with something that is upgraded or improved. Similarly, I believe it will help us to replace judgment with reverence.

If we see ourselves and others through the eyes of reverence, our world changes. Reverence means we see the spark of divinity in every person we meet – no matter who they are. And we hold them in awe and wonder – we acknowledge that they are amazing beings with amazing hearts. Sometimes we have to keep reminding ourselves but if you can truly view someone else with reverence, you will be stunned at the difference it makes in all your dealings with them.

NEVER GIVE UP- IT'S A CHOICE

It's so easy and natural for most of us to give up when the going is tough. And it's tough learning new things and changing how we do things and what we think because the work we actually have to do is energy expensive. It takes effort, commitment, perseverance, patience and discipline. And so we perceive it as hard – especially if we don't see the value in it for us.

We give up – often just before the change is cemented or we reap the benefits of our efforts. Instead of giving up, how wonderful it would be if we could face change with cheerful enthusiasm! Having faith that things will work out, doing our best, being optimistic and staying cheerfully engaged throughout the whole process makes change a joyful process!

So much of change is a choice. A choice of how we look at it; being aware of our expectations and beliefs and choosing to change them if necessary; choosing to be engaged and connected; choosing to participate; choosing to serve rather than just seeking personal gain – so many choices!

CELEBRATE

As leaders, we need to choose to present change in a way that touches people's hearts AND minds. To give them the skills, knowledge, confidence, and courage to be successful with the new changes;

to encourage them, and most importantly, to celebrate small changes along the way. Our brains need to see /feel/hear the changes quickly, so our hearts are encouraged, and we stay motivated to participate and be engaged. There is a big difference between participating and participating and being engaged. In short, change your perceptions first and your world and others around you will change.

Touch people's hearts if you want them to change their behavior; create as many 'ah ha' moments as you can; consistently remind them of the 'ah ha'; create a context in which people take ownership of the changes that are necessary; treat them with reverence; teach, show, and train them so they can be good at the new tasks; give people a sense of purpose and meaning in what they are doing – some sense of service and serving others; and celebrate their successes.

Then keep doing it! That way you reframe change from something uncomfortable into a process in which people feel valued, cared for, and that they are growing and developing.

You'll see – change can be joyful!

P.S. If you haven't already...remember to sign up for my husband, Ken Wright's, free newsletter, filled with tips on how to lead "The Wright Way." You can sign up on his website at: www.thewrightcoaching.com

“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing themselves”

--Leo Tolstoy