

# Sagacity

Wisdom  
in Action

The e-newsletter for leaders, and those who care for them

Spring 2006

The last few decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind – computer programmers who could crank code, lawyers who could craft contracts, MBAs who could crunch numbers.

The keys to the kingdom are changing hands. The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind – creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers.

Daniel Pink,  
*A Whole New Mind*

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Coaching & Development for  
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Andrea Sighetich  
541-318-5748  
[www.SageCoach.com](http://www.SageCoach.com)  
[Andrea@SageCoach.com](mailto:Andrea@SageCoach.com)

## A Whole New Leadership?

In the future, will we require business leaders to have a Master of Fine Arts instead of an MBA? If Daniel Pink, in his book, *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*, is right, then perhaps there is a whole new model for leadership just around the corner as well? Much as he did with his groundbreaking and prophetic first book, *Free Agent Nation*, Pink has the aptitude to make sense of the times we are in, and to articulate a well-grounded vision for the future. In *Free Agent Nation*, he predicted the emergence of entrepreneurship and contract work as a viable career path and a viable resource to organizations. Now, in *A Whole New Mind*, Pink again objectively observes the world, explores the patterns impacting our societies and economies, and helps us to name the radical shifts we are looking at.

As I read what Pink wrote about these shifts and the resulting changes in required skills, I kept wondering, “Will a new leadership model emerge that parallels these changes?” Does a “Whole New Mind” herald a “Whole New Leadership!” Let’s take a look!

## Abundance, Asia, Automation & the Rise of the Right Brain

Pink identifies three global trends that merge to create a new way of being successful in the world – what he calls the “Whole New Mind.” **Abundance** is the first of these three trends. We live in a time in which there is a phenomenal array of products available almost anywhere in the developed world, from refrigerators to cell phones to hubcaps. And, not only is there a wide number of products – but there are many, many choices within each product. For example, have you noticed what has happened to TVs? If you’ve shopped for a new TV recently, you know that you can choose among 50 different screen sizes, between 10 inches and 84 inches! Then, of course, there’s a myriad of other decisions to make: HDTV, flat screen, surround sound, in silver or matte black or oak finish, with electronic ergonomic controls and on and on. Nearly every product has a similar range of options. And each of these TVs does essential the same thing. How do we differentiate products today? Pink writes “For business, it’s no longer enough to create a product that’s reasonably priced and adequately functional. It must also be beautiful, unique and meaningful ...” (pg 32)

This abundance fuels two important outcomes. First, today’s products are differentiated by *design* rather than functional differences. As a result, many leading business now understand that we need staff with aesthetic design sense, artistic capabilities, and knowledge about how products and people interface. Second, this mass of product causes us to realize how unsatisfying most products really are and how materialism is ultimately not fulfilling. This abundance is having a profound impact, compelling many of us to seek meaning and purpose in life, beyond the acquisition of things. The impact on jobs is equally profound. If your work simply produces objects and does not contribute to consumers’ growing pursuit of nonmaterial services and products that help people find greater meaning in life, your skill set and work may become obsolete.

Our society is growing jobs that create new designs, and jobs that focus on meaning and purpose in life.

The second trend Pink considers germane, he calls *Asia*. Research reported in *The Financial Times* and Forrester Research indicates that one in four IT jobs will be located offshore by 2010, and that at least 3.3 million white-collar jobs will shift from the US to India, China, Russia and other countries by 2015. The implication of moving large numbers of jobs to other countries is significant. IT skills are abundant in other countries, and what began as a trickle of outsourcing white-collar jobs will soon become a flood, simply because it is ultimately cost effective.

The third and final trend is *Automation*. Pink writes that “Any job that depends on routines – that can be reduced to a set of rules, or broken down into a set of repeatable steps – is at risk.” (pg 44) These jobs are at risk because they can be performed – often more accurately, faster, and cheaper – by a computer.

These three compelling trends – abundance, Asia and automation – are driving the need for a new set of skills in the workplace. If your work – or the work that you lead – can be done cheaper by overseas labor, or faster by a computer, or if it does not offer something that satisfies the nonmaterial desires of this abundant age – your role is even more at risk. To stay gainfully employed, you may need to retool your skill set.

This new set of skills emerges from the right side of our brain – the side of the brain that sees the big picture and creates context and patterns. A few key differences between the left and right brain functions:

- The left side recognizes serial events. The right side interprets things simultaneously.
- The left side specializes in the specifics of language. The right side interprets emotions and context and ascribes meaning to the language.
- The left side analyses information. The right side synthesizes it.

Pink’s conclusion is that in the current and future work world, we need a “Whole New Mind” – a mind that integrates the left and right side. His rationale is that we are emerging from a time of information analysis, relying primarily on the analysis of the left side of the brain, into a time of synthesis and context, which emerge from the right side. The “whole new mind” is the mind that integrates both sides. Left-side thinking remains necessary, but it is no longer sufficient. Right-side thinking that creates artistic and emotional beauty, detects patterns and opportunities, combines seemingly unrelated ideas into innovations, and understands the subtleties of human interaction is necessary to survive and thrive in the society where we live.

## Six Senses

The second half of Pink’s book describes six “senses” or skills that we need to thrive in the time of abundance, Asia and automation. I wonder how these six skills will impact and change how we lead people in these emerging days?

- **DESIGN:** No longer is function sufficient; we must *design* products that engage the emotions.
- **STORY:** Argument and logical analysis are no longer adequate and compelling. Today we must be able to persuade with a *story* about our product that communicates meaning and possibility.
- **SYMPHONY:** While focus is important, it is insufficient. The ability to put pieces together, to see trends and patterns, to see the big picture and to cross boundaries, to combine disparate elements will be required for our future survival. Pink calls this sense *symphony*, because every instrument adds value to the end result.
- **EMPATHY:** As leaders we know now that logic is insufficient for leading, engaging and inspiring. We also need *empathy*, a skill that continues to grow in importance.
- **PLAY:** Seriousness is not a hallmark of the excellent leader. We are learning that humor and *play* in leadership is what engages others. If it is fun, I’ll likely do it better and stay with it longer.
- **MEANING:** It almost goes without saying that the accumulation of material goods is no longer fulfilling. You’ve seen it among your friends and family – more and more of us are striving for spirituality, for purpose, and for *meaning*.

**Implications for Leaders.** The compelling question is, if we need to hire more design skills instead of simply functional skills, do we need more design skills as leaders? If we need copy that transcends the logic of a product and address the story of it, is it time to build our skills in story-telling? If we demand the ability to see connections and linkages, how do we hone a leadership strength of seeing patterns? If we know that logic is an insufficient argument and that empathy is crucial, does it not follow that our emotional intelligence and empathy will have a greater bearing on our measure of leadership competence? If the creation of play and the discovery of meaning are essential to our long-term sustainability as individuals, just what are the implications for us as leaders?

Do we need to have these senses ourselves? If we accept this new model of the skills in our emerging world, doesn’t it follow naturally that these senses are essential for leading in this new world? Pink doesn’t specifically address leadership, and yet I think the deep truth in his perspective implies a shift in leadership.

**Design:** Leaders today (and tomorrow) do not simply manage function – we are continually called upon to design various aspects of our business, service and

products. We design processes and work flow. We design communication strategies, create organizational structures, change and innovate how we inspire and lead. As effective and powerful leaders, our added value is no longer simply the ability to produce the same product or service with the same consistency – but to create new and innovative ways to present, sell and market that product or service externally to our customers and internally to our staff. Today, corporate recruiters are visiting top design schools such as Rhode Island School of Design to recruit Masters of Fine Arts for business positions. BMW’s Chris Bangle says “We don’t make automobiles,” but “moving works of art that express the driver’s love of quality.” If this is true, how can we as leaders NOT be designers? (Chris Bangle, “The Ultimate Creativity Machine: How BMW Turns Art into Profits” in *Harvard Business Review*, January 2001.)

“Businesspeople don’t need to understand designers better. They need to be designers.”  
Roger Martin, Dean, Rotman Management School

**Story:** From Jack Welch to Oprah Winfrey, we frequently hear about “story.” There are leadership workshops offered today that teach us how to tell stories, to communicate the impact of information. Information itself – so abundantly available – is insufficient for inspiring others or ensuring our success. Economists calculate that 25% of GDP is persuasion, and that means we need a good story about our product! Robert McKee teaches a workshop called *Story Seminar* for aspiring screenwriters. But who actually attends his seminar? You guessed it, more and more, it is business people who fill the seats. (See “Storytelling that Moves People: A Conversation with Screenwriting Coach Robert McKee” in June 2003 *Harvard Business Review*.)

**Symphony:** Leaders continually integrate disparate parts into a whole. We’re constantly synthesizing information to feed our decisions and to ferret out what is important. Daniel Goleman, well-known for his work on emotional intelligence, writes about a study of executives at fifteen large companies, and concludes: “Just one cognitive ability distinguished start performers from average: pattern recognition, the ‘big picture’ thinking that allows leaders to pick out meaningful trends from a welter of information around them and think strategically far into the future.” (Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, page 33)

**Empathy:** It comes as no surprise to any leader that logic does not always present a compelling case. We also need to imagine ourselves in another person’s shoes and intuit what they are feeling, and lead from that place of empathy. The subtle dynamics of motivation, inspiration and interaction – to name just a few emotions and inner feelings – are the new tools of our leadership.

“Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate and to connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives ...” Oprah Winfrey

**Play:** Did you know that there are more than 2500 laughter clubs in the world? “Laughter clubs? What are they?” you ask! Surprisingly, there is no comedian at a laughter club standing in front of the crowd to make people laugh. There’s no clown juggling and bumbling flaming torches. In laughter clubs, people come together in parks and shopping centers to laugh. They “just laugh.” Each exercise in these 30 minute laughter sessions encourages participants to laugh ... the rolling laugh, the meek laugh, the belly laugh, the guffaw. Once you begin to laugh, especially with other people, the laugh develops a life of its own and takes over. Laughing is a right-brain activity that incites creativity, joy and even physical healing. Play, laughter and humor are finding their way into organizations who want to inspire commitment and creativity. (Poke around this site for a few minutes: <http://www.worldlaughter.com/> to see what I mean.) We already know that play reduces tension, increases creativity, builds relationships, and improves teamwork. As mentioned earlier, we also already know that humor is an accurate marker of managerial effectiveness. I wonder, is it really possible to lead effectively ... and not play?

“He who laughs last didn’t get it.” – Helen Giangregorio

**Meaning:** Victor Frankl, author of the landmark book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, and inmate of Auschwitz and Dachau said, “Man’s main concern is not to gain pleasure and avoid pain, but rather to see a meaning in his life.” Pink argues that while we live a life of abundance, in spite of poverty and other social maladies we have not yet conquered, most of us in the advanced world no longer endure suffering. Once our basic needs for food and shelter are met, whether we flip burgers or lead a corporation, we are searching for meaning. We all want to contribute, make a difference, and enjoy what we do. Meaning is profoundly important in our lives today. As leaders, we cannot ignore this.

What is the “Whole New Mind” of leadership? How do Pink’s keen observations change the way we think about leadership? What new skills will we need as leaders? What new leadership models will emerge as we transition from the information age to the conceptual age? Send your thoughts to [Andrea@SageCoach.com](mailto:Andrea@SageCoach.com), by March 31. I’ll pick my favorite response and send you a copy of “Whole New Mind.”

## 101 Things to Do Before I Die

Speaking of meaning and purpose ... every year, at the New Year, I revisit my values, passions and purpose and set new goals for the year. This year I took on a new task that I am finding both daunting and inspiring. It's much tougher than I thought it would be – and yet I can see how important it will be for sculpting the remaining years of my life. I'm creating a list of "101 Things to Do Before I Die."

I challenge you to join me in this endeavor. It's fun! And personally, it certainly has helped me to see how important design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning are in my life right now – and in the future I choose to create.

Let me know how *your* list evolves!

**If you want help building *your*  
leadership skills, please contact us!**

**Andrea@SageCoach.com**

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