

# EFS SERVANT LEADERSHIP NEWSLETTER

“Our life is what our thoughts make it.” Marcus Aurelius

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**TOPIC THIS ISSUE: TRUST AT THE MOMENT OF CONTACT**

**A REMEMBRANCE OF JUDITH E. GLASER**



*Judith E. Glaser, passed in November 2018 after a three-year battle with metastatic pancreatic cancer. As many of you know, Judith was instrumental in my quest of understanding neuroscience and creating a WE culture. I had the privilege to partner with her for a time in our desire to serve people and organizations to thrive. This newsletter issue is taken from the unpublished forerunner of her best seller Conversational Intelligence. We are blessed by her work and contributions.*



## AT THE MOMENT OF CONTACT

**BY: JUDITH E. GLASER**

The decision to trust or distrust someone takes only a moment. That moment – whether it be a handshake, a telephone call, or an email – locks in a relationship trajectory that may last for weeks, months, or even possibly a lifetime.

Our brain has been conditioned to make snap judgments in **identifying our friends and foes** – those people that we trust to act in our best interest, as opposed to those that seek to take advantage of us.

Ultimately, it is trust that begins, maintains, and in some cases ends relationships, so it is vitally important for both our personal and professional lives that we understand the power and influence of trust.

While the study of trust and distrust has traditionally been left to the realm of psychology, recent advances in technology have opened this topic of research to those in the field of neuroscience. With the ability to see inside the brain through fMRI scans (Functional Magnetic Resonance Instruments) and other sophisticated tools, scientists are able to identify the neural pathways that are activated when trust is either created or destroyed. When these neural pathways are activated they in turn cause the release of neurochemicals, which in turn escalates our feeling of trust or distrust.

The promising news is that if we learn to identify the signs that alert us to the erosion of trust before we get triggered, we can *learn* to activate the higher-level brain functions located in the prefrontal cortex or what some call the ‘executive

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brain,' where empathy, judgment and our more strategic social skills reside.

That's right: **Different parts of the brain activate when we feel trust rather than distrust.** When we quell fear and activate the prefrontal cortex along with a system located throughout our brain called "mirror neurons" – designed to help us form our social connections – we strengthen our ability to bond with others, not run from them.

**In less scientific terms, here is what trust is all about.** Most of us have expectations, which guide our behavior. We expect things to happen and when they do, we feel comfortable about the future and our decisions. Yet more often than not, gaps arise between what we expect and what we get. We become uncertain of our relationship with others and our fear networks begin to take control of our brains. As a result, we find ourselves lacking the neurochemical support to have trust. This ultimately disrupts our ability to think clearly and rationally.

Our good judgment gives way to aggressive, passive aggressive or other fear-based behaviors that have huge implications on our ability to be effective at our jobs and in our personal relationships. Our challenge, therefore, is to find ways to head off our fears or, at the very least, understand where they may be coming from.

## **RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE TASK**

**BY: JUDITH E. GLASER**

When we look below the surface of our everyday lives to better understand how we form connections with other people, we learn that hardwired mechanisms in the brain play a crucial role in establishing and sustaining trust; by discovering more about how this system works we can find ways to support that process – and figure out the best approach for mending fences when trust is broken.

**Trust is the golden thread that keeps us connected.** It is based on a sophisticated human interplay that is at its best when we perform in sync with each other. Whether it's an acrobat at Cirque de Soleil flying through the air, arms extended to her partner, or a team working together to get a new drug to market, we human beings collaborate to achieve amazing things when trust is high. This means that in the workplace we need to learn to put the topic of trust on the table when we first join an organization, rather than just hoping it will all work out. When we start a new job, typically we focus on understanding our work assignments, clarifying our goals, and clarifying how our progress will be measured. **But as we focus on tasks and evaluations, we tend to skip over the all-important relationship work we need to do – and this is where trust is born.**

## **UNDERSTANDING THE NEUROCHEMISTRY OF TRUST**

**BY: JUDITH E. GLASER**

Inspired leaders at all levels of business can be motivated to think and act in new ways as they come to understand the "neuroscience of we" – the brain dynamics that lead to either defensiveness or growth, to high levels of wariness or high levels of trust. Driven by a cascade of millions of neurochemical reactions, these states of mind translate into how we build trusting relationships with others, how we communicate, and how we

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shape our everyday relationships.

The work of Matt Lieberman and Naomi Eisenberger, scientists at UCLA, indicates that our brains are designed to be social – that is to say, our need for contact is greater than our need for safety. Connecting to others is not just about passing information back and forth between us. Nor is it just about the words we use when we speak with each other. In fact, verbal language accounts for only 7% of the exchange that takes place between people.

**The tone and perceived intent of our interactions has far more power to influence our neurochemistry than words alone.**

For example, when a leader trusts that an employee will be able to tackle a project successfully, she will communicate that confidence through subtle and not-so-subtle signals. At this moment something happens neurochemically. There is a shift in the employee’s experience that can be directly connected to increases in neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine. When this state of positive arousal comes with honest and well-deserved (sincere) praise, employees feel they are trusted and supported by their boss. They will take more risks, they will speak up more and stand up for their good ideas, and they will be more confident with their peers.

*When employees are given honest feedback, it energizes them and motivates them to access new skills and talents. Yet when the interaction feels harsh, judgmental, or humiliating, an entirely different cascade of neurotransmitters creates a completely disparate brain landscape that will also affect our future interactions. Rather than fall into this outmoded way of thinking, of “replacing employees who aren’t cutting it,” or punishing them for not achieving expectations, **leaders can now learn new leadership practices to establish trust, propelling mediocre employees to become better, and ensuring that good employees become even greater!***

## THE NEUROSCIENCE OF WE

BY: JUDITH E. GLASER

What we learned from deconstructing the moment of contact in the sales calls between the MDs and the reps supports what I call the *neuroscience of we*. During their early interactions, the sales reps were triggering the amygdala, a part of the brain that has long been associated with our mental and emotional state. By turning their meeting with doctors into a battle, the sales reps were activating the circuitry of fight and flight, rather than creating a desire to prescribe their products. The brains of the MDs were just doing their job, protecting the doctors from potential harm.

To get to the root of the issue, I developed a program that taught the sales reps “**STAR Skills™**” – or Skills That Achieve Results. Those skills are: 1) *building rapport*; 2) *listening without judgment*; 3) *asking discovery questions*; 4) *rewarding success*; and 5) *dramatizing the message*. These skills are simple, powerful, and get at the heart of building trusting relationships. They draw on a part of the brain known as the Reticular Activating System (RAS), associated with many vitally important functions, including sleep, wakefulness, and the ability to consciously focus our attention.

**Building rapport** focuses us on getting into sync with someone, or getting on the same wavelength as the person with whom you are talking. **Listening without judgment** involves paying full attention to the other person as they speak, while consciously setting aside the tendency to judge the other person. **Asking discovery**



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**questions** opens our mind to the power of curiosity, as well as to the possibility of changing our minds as we listen and learn. **Rewarding success and dramatizing the message**, the last two skills, also play a role in sustaining a healthy trusting relationship. **Rewarding success focuses us on seeing what “success looks like” for both people** – and when we focus on mutual success; we create greater connectivity and coherence. Dramatizing the message is a reminder that we need to be alert to whether or not our messages are clear and understood by others. This elevates our awareness to stay in sync until we are certain we are on the same wavelength. When we are, we achieve coherence with others.

STAR skills serve as guideposts for our engagement process, but they are also calculated to create a positive shift in brain chemistry. Supportive engagement makes us feel safe, as oxytocin enhances our feeling of bonding, and dopamine and serotonin contribute to a feeling of wellbeing. These neurotransmitters damp down the defensive role of the amygdala, freeing the prefrontal cortex—the newer part of the brain—to allow new ideas, insights, and wisdom to emerge. This part of the brain also contains the mirror neurons that contribute to our ability to feel empathy for each other.

When I was working with Boehringer, scientists were not yet using fMRI's to see inside of our brains at the moment of social contact. No one could actually see when the sales reps and doctors were in sync, yet we could certainly observe what happened when they *did* learn to build trust. Adopting the five STAR skills had an extraordinary impact on quelling the physician's more primal reactions, allowing them to engage the more positive impulses that some researchers call the “heart brain,” along with the prefrontal cortex, with its ability for strategy and planning. We know because not only did this shift lead to more open communication and higher levels of trust during sales calls, it led to higher levels of commitment to the Boehringer brand and its products.

Through the STAR Skills program, the reps not only changed their language, they created a totally new relationship with physicians, moving from adversaries to trusted partners. Word got out about our work with BI, and the sales management team and I were asked to speak at large pharmaceutical conferences to other reps from other companies about this powerful approach. At first some of the BI sales reps were reluctant to “*give the competition our secrets,*” but the BI management team felt differently. They said, “*It's okay, we'll just keep learning, and stay ahead of the pack that way.*”

Within eighteen months, Boehringer Ingelheim had dramatically increased sales and expanded its market share. In industry comparisons, BI's sales reps moved from #39 up to #1 in the eyes of physicians. What started with a simple process of deconstructing the conversations between reps and doctors ended up with an incredible success story that has continued for over 20 years. As reps and physicians embraced the new approach, profits soared.

Success is contagious, and our work had a ripple effect across the company. Soon management and leadership teams all wanted to be part of the collaborative approach we had created with their sales reps, so we continued to build leadership, innovation and management programs across all of BI. Today, more than two decades later, the sales team is still using this approach as the foundation of their sales training programs and for advanced sales development programs for seasoned reps.