
3. How the Brain Processes Information

One Piece at a Time vs. All at Once

You have most likely had some exposure to left and right brain theory, so I won't elaborate on this subject other than to examine how the brain processes information.

The most important difference between the left and right brain functions for our discussion is that the left brain is analytical and the right brain is intuitive. Generally, the analytical function has the ability to look at one piece of information at a time, while the intuitive function can look at all the pieces of information at once. For example, if you put three oranges on your kitchen table and you asked your analytical mind how many oranges there were, it would count "one, two, three" and then tell you three oranges. If you asked the intuitive mind how many oranges are on the table, it would look at the table and instantly "see" or "feel" three oranges without having to count them. In this way, the analytical mind "figures out" the answers to questions and the intuitive mind has an "instant knowing" or "intuitive feeling" of the answer.

Now you might say you can understand how the analytical mind can count the oranges and come up with three, but how can the intuitive mind know there are three oranges without counting them?

The functions of the brain are divided so that the analytical mind (or left side of the brain) collects information one piece at a time while the right brain (the intuitive side) takes that information and turns it into a feeling. The right brain, or intuitive mind, has its own special language which is intuitive feelings.

The intuitive mind takes the information about the oranges from the analytical mind in terms of what three oranges look like or feel like and then turns it into an “intuitive feeling” or “instant knowing.” Notice the opposing yet complementary functions of the two minds—the analytical mind’s ability to identify single pieces of information and the intuitive mind’s ability to put many pieces of information together all at once into a single “intuitive feeling.”

This leads us to the definition of a “gut instinct” or “intuitive feeling.” An intuitive feeling is a quiet sense of knowing that represents a few bits of information up to millions of bits of information all processed at once. And, because the intuitive mind sees all the information available at once, there is no limit to the amount of information that we can process in a fraction of a second. As soon as you add more information, it becomes part of the “whole” or big picture that the intuition can monitor.

Internal Mental Teamwork

For example, one way we can see the intuitive mind at work is when we learn to do something that requires physical coordination. Remember how you learned to ride a bicycle? You probably had an adult there to help balance the bicycle while you got on it.

Then you pushed forward on the pedal that was the highest from the ground, which started the bike to move. With your hands on the handlebars, you tried to steer the front wheel first to the right, then to the left, and you were off! What a thrill! You were on your own. Then you felt yourself begin to lean too far to the right. Suddenly you lost control and crash! You hit the ground hard, but that didn't stop you. With scraped knees and knuckles you said, "Let's try it again!"

While all that happened, your analytical mind worked quickly to collect, label and categorize all the little bits of information that had taken place, processing it for future reference. At the same time, your intuitive mind simultaneously took that information from the analytical mind and put it together into intuitive feelings that allowed you to do several things at the same time. Your intuitive mind collected and processed even more information from each attempt you made until suddenly you could balance yourself on your bicycle and ride easily with no conscious thought of all the steps involved. "Awesome" doesn't begin to describe this miracle that we take for granted.

Remember what it was like when you learned to drive a car, especially one with a stick shift? How about tying your shoelaces? Easy, right? It is now, but you fumbled through being a beginner while your analytical mind figured out the steps and your intuitive mind got the feeling for which combinations of actions worked and which didn't. Without the analytical-intuitive team within your brain, you couldn't do even the simplest things like get out of bed, walk to the bathroom and brush your teeth. We do these tasks without thinking about them now, but it took millions of pieces of information to learn them initially. We use the brilliance of the analytical-intuitive team in everything we do.

Moving to a New Level

Think of any complicated activity that you perform. With each one you jumped to a whole new level of skill or proficiency once your intuition got the feel of it. In typing or playing the piano, it was being able to feel and know where the keys were without having to look at them. In ballroom dancing, it's when you felt the flow of the dance steps and didn't have to consciously think about them. In golf and tennis, you moved to a new skill level when you watched the club or racquet face hit the ball rather than look to where you wanted the ball to go. In all of these examples, it felt risky to let go and trust the intuitive feeling rather than to consciously monitor every little detail.

In life and in business it's the same thing. We can learn to trust the feeling of our intuition and move to a whole new level of competence while developing skills and abilities that we had no idea we could achieve. With our intuition, there's nothing we can't learn to do and no limit as to how good we can be. Our intuition is always capable of going to a new and higher level.

It is important to realize the power of our intuition. We're not used to thinking of ourselves as the most powerful information processing center ever invented. We forget that through our intuition we have the capacity to process an unlimited amount of information in seconds! Therefore, there is no limit to the potential of how good we can be except for the limitations we impose on ourselves.

Most of us have been taught to think of our intelligence as the sum total of what we learned in school along with what we've read or heard, combined with a few lessons from the "School of Hard Knocks." This level of limited awareness is the biggest barrier to achieving our true potential. The key to realizing your

potential in business and in life is to rekindle the thrill of learning, not just out of a book, but being willing to “skin your knee” again.

Are you willing to take a couple of spills to experience the joy and thrill of really being at your best? Would you be willing to get a little mud on your sleeve to learn how to be “on a roll” more of the time? Would you be willing to trust your intuition and move to a whole new level of competence in all aspects of your life? If your answer is yes, then let’s begin.