

Book Review and Summary
***A Whole New Mind* by Daniel H. Pink**
Riverhead Books
A Member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.
New York 2005

The introduction to this book makes a bold statement about the future. Leaders with traditional business school skills and traits are now a dime a dozen. There is a new sheriff in town and he is in high demand. The author says that the future belongs to those with a right-side mindset—creators, artists, empathizers, pattern recognizers and “meaning makers”. We are moving from the logical, linear, computer-based Information Age to a “Conceptual Age” in our economy and society, one where creativity, innovation, empathy and big-picture thinking will be rewarded and recognized.

To support his big idea, Pink tells us that the most valued degree in business is now the MFA, Master of Fine Arts. “Corporate Recruiters have begun visiting the top arts grad schools—places such as the Rhode Island School of Design, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Michigan’s Cranbrook Academy of Art—in search of talent.” There are only a few schools that offer this degree right now and it’s tough to get accepted. Pink says the MFA is the new MBA.

He offers two reasons for this major shift in business thinking: 1) Jobs that the MBA used to do are now being done overseas through outsourcing and 2) business leaders have recognized that the biggest competitive differentiator they can have is for their products to be “physically beautiful and emotionally compelling”.

The author does a quick analysis of left-brain (L-directed) versus right-brain (R-directed) thinking. He believes we need to maintain our L-directed skills, but master six essential R-directed aptitudes, or **“Six Senses”: Design, Story, Symphony, Empathy, Play and Meaning**. With the description of these senses, I think that he has tapped into the subtle shifts that will shape our future. The rest of the book is devoted to a discussion of each of the six senses. At the end of each chapter, there is an additional chapter of suggested exercises or activities that you can do in order to stimulate these senses. I will give a very limited description here of each of the six senses and I don’t expect to give them the attention they deserve, but I hope it’s enough to tantalize you into reading the book. With interesting detail, the author gives good examples and analogies as to how these concepts will play out in our future lives.

Design

Good design in our lives is essential—from appliances, cars and furniture to things like “butterfly” ballots that may have affected a presidential election. Design is critical to every business as products must be ever more user-friendly,

beautiful, compact, energy-efficient, ergonomic and useful. Good design is essential to good products and R-directed thinking allows us to understand how people use products in order to make products better

Story

Pink describes story as “context enriched by emotion”. Story is how information has traditionally been passed from one generation to another. Even though facts are now available instantly and virtually for free, story will remain important because of the emotional impact. It’s the emotional element that makes information stick.

Symphony

As Pink says, “Symphony is largely about relationships.” The Conceptual Age will reward those who can see connections between seemingly unrelated areas. They will be multi-taskers. They can blend their knowledge of diverse talents and skills to push the “boundary” of accepted practices—for example, someone who takes their knowledge of math into the medical field or someone who applies their knowledge of music to business concepts.

Empathy

The concept of being able to enter someone else’s “shoes” has always been considered an essential leadership attribute, but this ability will be in even higher demand in the future. Everyone can be more successful by being empathetic--business people, parents, colleagues, employees, politicians, doctors, lawyers, nurses, service people and just about any other role in our society. Pink offers several ways to improve your empathy skills.

Play

This chapter talks about a man who has developed “Laughter Clubs” throughout the world and the positive impact they are having on business and community. The Conceptual Age will allow us to combine both work and play. A great example of this is the video game. The author makes a case that video games are a big part of our future by giving us compelling statistics regarding video game use by young people.

Meaning

As a society, we are on a high energy search for meaning. Pink cites a report from USC titled *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*. In the report, spirituality was defined by most executives not as religion, but as “the basic desire to find purpose and meaning in one’s life”. Among a lot of other things, the chapter refers to the rise in popularity of labyrinths. If you don’t know, labyrinths are

circular, unobstructed mazes that end at the center where one takes a leisurely walk and meditates. There is something special about walking a labyrinth that gives most people a spiritual experience. If you want to know more look up www.labyrinthsociety.org. and you can find a labyrinth near you.

Now comes the review part. I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I believe Daniel Pink has tapped into a trend that is still simmering beneath the surface. It may start as simply as valuing creative types by putting them on a fast track to management, but it will end as a seismic shift. In ancient times, we valued the artisan and craftsman as evidenced by the legacy of incredible works of art and architecture. The industrial and information ages later stimulated us to explore the left sides of our brains to such an extent that we developed computers to take our logical thinking to unimaginable heights. It's only fitting that the pendulum would swing back to the right side of the brain when we once again realize the value of creativity and innovation. Our true breakthrough will come when we combine R-directed and L-directed thinking in equal parts.