

## **You Should Use Both Sides of Your Brain, Right?**

Author Dan Pink argues that "nowadays, the fault line between who gets ahead and who doesn't is going to be mastery of these abilities that are more characteristic of the right hemisphere -- artistry, empathy, big picture thinking. Those are the sorts of abilities that I think are really going to matter the most, not only in our individual career success, but also in our personal satisfaction."

[Daniel H. Pink is the author of the just-published book, "A Whole New Mind: Moving From the Information Age to the Conceptual Age."]

UBIQUITY: Tell us a little about your background.

PINK: I grew up in central Ohio, went to college, graduated with a degree in linguistics and all the job prospects attached thereto.

UBIQUITY: Where did you go to school?

PINK: Northwestern University. Actually, linguistics is a really, really terrific major for a whole bunch of reasons. I studied every aspect of linguistics, from sociolinguistics to phonology to neurolinguistics to historical linguistics. The broad study of language. It was a really great major, in part because it was just so intrinsically interesting, because language is perhaps the most important thing that makes us human. And the other thing about it is that, it was such a small department – we had only four majors in my year – I got to really get to know faculty and really do some interesting research, and just had a really rich academic experience.

UBIQUITY: What appealed to you about it? How did you happen to choose that as an undergraduate major?

PINK: As with most things I've done, I just followed my nose and followed my curiosity. I ended up taking the introductory course in linguistics and found it endlessly interesting. Even when I was young I was interested in writing, but I was also interested in language and how it worked. And it turned out to be this incredibly whole-minded discipline. Language is what makes us human, so linguistics is in many ways the quintessential liberal arts major, in that it touched not only on the hard sciences and on psychology and sociolinguistics and some of the social sciences, but also touched on arts. In terms of pure vocational applications, it was completely useless, but in terms of just intrinsic interest and fascination, it was fantastic.

UBIQUITY: With all those disciplines woven together it sounds like a kind of Noah's Ark program.

PINK: Exactly. That's a very, very good way to put it. That's exactly what its attraction was. Another attractive thing about the linguistics program at Northwestern was that it was a very small department, so the classes in my major were rarely more than eight or 10 people, and every upper-level class I had was a seminar. As a result of that, there weren't the insane Blue Book exams -- just research papers, which allowed me to follow my own nose and do what I was interested in, under the guidance of faculty. It was terrific. I was conducting various kinds of sociolinguistic experiments that I thought were interesting, rather than simply scribbling down the answer on a test.

UBIQUITY: But now you also have a law degree from Yale, right? And are happy to say that you've never practiced law?

PINK: Yes, after getting my degree in linguistics I worked for a little bit and then I went and got a law degree. I'm not proud of this, but it basically was the path of least resistance. You know, what happens when you aren't really sure what you want to do with your life and you have good grades? Well, you go to law school. So I went to law school, but didn't like it very much. I didn't detest it, but I knew very, very early on that there's no way I would ever want to practice law for a living. Still, in law school, I did meet my wife, so it wasn't a total loss.

UBIQUITY: Is she a lawyer now?

PINK: She actually quit after years of my saying that she was too smart to be a lawyer. She was a litigator at the Justice Department for several years, and now is actually a part-time employee of my little business here in the D.C. area. And we also have three little kids, eight, six and two, so she's fairly busy doing that kind of stuff, too.

UBIQUITY: What did you do after law school?

PINK: I didn't want to get a job as a lawyer, so I started working in politics. I was always very interested in politics and I had worked on a number of political campaigns. And as my involvement in politics went on I eventually ended up as a political speech writer. I did that for a while, and worked as a speech writer for the U.S. Labor Secretary, Robert Reich, and then I became a key speech writer to Vice President Al Gore during the end of the first term of the Clinton administration and the beginning of the second term. But then, having gotten pretty much fed up with being constrained from writing what I really thought, rather than what was supposed to appeal to whatever interest group we were pandering to at that instant, I decided to go out on my own, and went out on my own – this is now eight years ago – and began writing freelance speeches and magazine articles. It was then I realized that there were all these other folks who were going out on their own for all kinds of idiosyncratic reasons, so I ended up writing a book about the rise of all these folks who work for themselves. To research that book, I spent over a year with my family – then one daughter, and then toward the end of it, two daughters – traveling around the country interviewing hundreds and hundreds of people who work for themselves, so I could find out what was great about it, what stunk about it, why they did it, and how it was changing their life. And that turned into a book called "Free Agent Nation," which came out in 2001 in hard cover, and 2002 in paperback.

UBIQUITY: How did it do?

PINK: I think pretty well. It was a "Washington Post" bestseller, a business bestseller all over the United States and in Canada, and did very well in Japan, believe it or not. It didn't do well enough that I can retire on royalties, but it did do well enough that I can write another one without having to change my name.

UBIQUITY: Why do suppose it went over well in Japan?

PINK: I think it went over well in Japan in large part because it was so antithetical to the status quo in Japan. That is, Japan had been laboring under basically a 10-year recession. And part of the reason was that it had this enduring tradition of the "salary man" -- and in many ways, the free agent is the antithesis of the salary man. I think there are folks in

Japan who were really interested in understanding this other way of doing things, particularly in the younger generation. We also received a gratifying amount of press coverage in Japan -- there was Japanese TV coming to my house here in Washington interviewing me and interviewing my family and even going with me when I took my kids to school. They were interested in an alternative to what had been the established tradition in Japan, which is that you bind your fortunes, you bind your loyalty to one organization, and that's how it works. Because this was almost the direct opposite of that way of thinking, I think there was really great fascination with the book in Japan.

UBIQUITY: Apparently that salary man arrangement has diminished quite a bit recently.

PINK: Yes, and that's been a source of incredible social upheaval in Japan, particularly among the generation of people on whom the rules changed. And because Japan has doesn't have the tradition of entrepreneurship or even this kind of pursuit of individual meaning and individual purpose and individual desire, they have to look oftentimes overseas for, to understand how that operates in real life. Not surprisingly, the place to look for that is the land of the ultimate expression of radical individualism, which is the United States of America.

UBIQUITY: Let's jump to the present. How did you get associated with "Wired"?

PINK: When I came out of working in politics and in government I started writing speeches, because I was able to get that kind of work and it paid reasonably well. I also started doing magazine articles, and so ended up doing a fair amount of magazine work, which I really like to do much more than writing speeches. So after a few years I was able, thankfully, to phase entirely out of writing speeches and into writing stuff under my own byline. I had by then written for a number of magazines: I had a contract with "Fast Company" in its early days, and had done some work for "Wired," and ended up getting a contract with them, because they were doing the kind of stories that I love to read.

UBIQUITY: And the stories you love to read are about -- what?

PINK: They're about ideas before you've heard of them, people before they're famous. Explanations for what's going on at the intersection of advances in technology and how the economy operates and how people live their lives.

UBIQUITY: Sounds like your new book!

PINK: Why, yes.

UBIQUITY: Tell us it.

PINK: Well, this new book is called "A Whole New Mind," and it makes the case that three forces are moving us from one era -- the Information Age -- to another era, what I call the Conceptual Age. And this new era that's emerging, or that we're being nudged into, rewards a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind. It puts a premium on the sorts of abilities we've often overlooked and undervalued.

UBIQUITY: In what way?

PINK: Well, I mean, it used to be that, if you wanted to lead a reasonably successful, prosperous, middle-class life you became a "knowledge worker": you went to law school, you went to medical school, you became an engineer, you got an MBA. Those were the sorts

of jobs that led to the promised land of economic security and personal success and a sense of social prestige, even. And what I'm arguing in this book is that those sorts of jobs (and in particular, the sorts of abilities that have traditionally been embodied in those kind of jobs) are not the pathway to personal success, or professional success or personal fulfillment. The point of differentiation between who makes it and who doesn't -- not only in the economic sense, but also in the sense of satisfaction -- is going to be who has mastered a set of abilities that we've often looked down upon. And the metaphor that animates the book is the metaphor of the brain, that the human brain is divided into two halves, the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere. Of course, there's been a lot of really stupid stuff written about left brain this and right brain that, so in chapter one of my book I describe how I went to NIH -- the National Institutes of Health -- and got my brain scanned to see how my left hemisphere and right hemisphere responded to various situations and things.

UBIQUITY: Your motivation for doing that?

PINK: I use the differences between the two sides of the brain -- the left hemisphere being rational, linear, logical, sequential, and the right hemisphere being holistic, "big picture," simultaneous, synthetic rather than analytical -- as a metaphor for understanding the contours of our time. My argument is that the sorts of abilities that used to get you ahead were very characteristic of the left hemisphere -- logical, linear, analytical, computer-like, SAT-scored kinds of abilities; and that those abilities today, while necessary, are no longer sufficient. Nowadays, the fault line between who gets ahead and who doesn't is going to be mastery of these abilities that are more characteristic of the right hemisphere -- artistry, empathy, big picture thinking. Those are the sorts of abilities that I think are really going to matter the most, not only in our individual career success, but also in our personal satisfaction.

UBIQUITY: And what did it show?

PINK: First let me confess that there's something very daunting about looking at one's own brain, or at least an image of one's own brain. When I looked at the image of my brain, which appeared on the computer screen back in the control room, it looked like every other brain I've ever seen. I expected my brain to be cooler looking or something, or at least to be distinctive in some fashion. But it was, like, just a brain. It looked like anybody else's brain. So it's a little bit humbling in that regard.

UBIQUITY: We won't tell on you. So how did you do?

PINK: The neurologist who studied my brain, both the physiology of it and also the function of it, said I had about the most normal, pedestrian, unexceptional brain you could imagine.

UBIQUITY: We don't believe that. We think inside was a work of art.

PINK: Well, thank you, and I actually think there's something to that, and that if you were to look at the network of connections then you would draw a picture of all of us as unique, amazing human beings. If you can get at enough of a granular level, you can probably detect differences on the individual level between your brain and my brain, and that is what makes us interesting, unique, fascinating individuals.

UBIQUITY: You used the term "computer-like" a little while ago; do you feel that computers are changing to the extent that, at the highest level, they are becoming less "left-brained" and more "right-brained"?

PINK: I think what computers and software and the Internet and technology more broadly are doing is serving much the same function that machines in factories did for our backs. I'm sure you know the great American tale of John Henry, a guy who used his back and established incredible prowess and renown throughout the country because of his strong back; and then one day someone shows up at the work camp and says, I have a steam drill that is better than John Henry. And nobody believes him, and they have this battle between man and machine to see who can bore through the mountain fastest. And John Henry ended up winning, but he died immediately afterwards. And that story became this parable for a lost way of life in this country, that showed us that machines could do some things better than human beings, and as a result, some measure of human dignity had been lost.

UBIQUITY: And today?

PINK: I think something very, very similar is happening today with computers and the Internet and technology more broadly. So if you're talking about just calculation, computers can do it faster; IF we're talking about processing rules, computers can do it faster. You see this impacting the professions: for instance, TurboTax cutting into the livelihood of accountants, because all of calculation and rule-following and plugging-in-the-numbers you can do with software. You don't need a human being for as much time. Or go the profession I narrowly avoided, law. An uncontested divorce, for example, is essentially filling out forms. And it just so happened that lawyers had a monopoly, essentially on filling out the forms. If you use a lawyer to get an uncontested divorce, it's going to cost (depending on the jurisdiction) maybe \$3,000, but if you go online to CompleteCase.com you can do it for \$249, because all it is, is filling out forms, and the Web can automate a lot of that. Same thing is true with legal forms. Well, now you can go to USLegalForms.com and get all kinds of forms for \$14.95, and so you might want to go to a lawyer for an hour to look it over, rather than for 10 hours to start it from scratch. Those are just two small examples of how technology is automating certain kinds of left-brain functions -- things that are routine, that amount simply to following rules, that simply amount to following a recipe. A lot of those kind of functions can be done cheaper and faster by computers and software.

UBIQUITY: Did you choose your career as a writer as a self-defense strategy?

PINK: No, I'm not that analytical about these things. I did it basically because it's what I like doing and what I did reasonably well. And actually, I think that that's the ultimate career advice. I do believe that these abilities that I talk about in the book -- design, story, empathy, symphony, play and meaning -- are really essential, but I think ultimately the best career advice one can give anybody is: Do what you love.

UBIQUITY: Elaborate on those six key abilities you describe in your book.

PINK: They're abilities that I call high-concept and high-touch, and they end up being things that talented overseas knowledge workers can't do cheaper, that computers can't do faster, and that are in demand in an age of abundance -- an age that places a premium on various kinds of non-material, spiritual, aesthetic, emotional kind of yearnings. The first is design: today, in order to sell anything, function alone won't do it. So now you can go to Target and get a designer toilet brush, and Philippe Starck, a great designer from France, has a designer fly-swatter for 11 bucks. In this world of incredible abundance, where you go to any store and you have so many options, something that is purely functional isn't enough: it has to appeal to the right side of the brain, whether it's aesthetic appeal or spiritual appeal or an emotional appeal. And design is in many ways the quintessential whole-minded ability. It's not simply engineering. It's not at getting stuff to work, although that's

necessary. But it's getting stuff to work, but also getting stuff to work that also appeals to some kind of transcendent, non-material desire. So that's design.

UBIQUITY: The second ability you describe is "story." What do you mean by that?

PINK: I mean facts are not enough. You need story, you need context. In an age of Google, if I have a fact, you can come up with a counter-fact in 10 seconds, so facts alone are not enough. They're important, but not enough, in a world of basically, of ubiquitous, free facts. What really matters is the ability to put those facts into context and deliver them with emotional impact. And that's what a story is. I think that this world of ubiquitous, free facts has placed a premium on the ability to tell stories -- as a marketing maneuver, as a way to navigate one's career. And so you see this now in products differentiating themselves based on their authentic "back story."

UBIQUITY: How does that work?

PINK: I write in the book about going to a food store and shopping for a bottle of wine. I like to drink red wine and I don't like to pay a lot, and I looked at these three bottles. They were nine or 10 bucks each. Two of the bottles had these fancy wine adjectives on the label, whereas the third bottle, called Two Brothers Big Tattoo Red, had on the label the story of how this wine came to be. It was the brainchild of these two brothers, Eric and Alex something, who decided to make this wine as a tribute to their mother, who had died of liver cancer. And some portion of the proceeds go to the hospice in northern Virginia, and the wine is in homage to their mother. Now, if you have a choice of three products, two of which have these fancy wine adjectives I don't even understand, and one of them has this compelling back story, what are you going to go with? Well, I ended up going with the one with the compelling back story.

UBIQUITY: The wine was okay?

PINK: Yes, it turned out to be a very good wine, and I've told people about it and I've bought it since. So that's how "story" is used to market wine. I also write about how doctors are being trained in what's called "narrative medicine," because so much of a patient's diagnosis is contained in his or her story. And so you have doctors who are learning various narrative techniques and keeping parallel charts, where they write down the quantitative stuff about a patient's condition but also have a parallel chart where they write a story about the patient, and maybe the patient's ailment from the patient's perspective. So that's story.

UBIQUITY: The third ability you describe is called "symphony." What does that mean?

PINK: Symphony is the ability to put all the pieces together, to see the big picture, to make novel combinations and invent something the world didn't know it was missing. That becomes important when people overseas, connected essentially for free by fiber optic cable, can do certain routine pieces of a work project, and computers can do the same thing. That puts a premium on the ability to see the big picture, the ability to combine disparate things and invent something new. And I call that skill symphony, an ability symphony. And then the fourth skill I call "empathy": it's the ability to stand in someone's shoes, to see with their eyes, to feel with their heart. And, again, it's something you can't outsource or automate. But it's something that becomes enormously important in basically every field of human endeavor – every field of professional endeavor. Whether it's sales, whether it's journalism, teaching, marketing, or something else, the ability to empathize

with others is, again, something you can't outsource or automate. And as a result, in this world, there's a premium on it.

UBIQUITY: The fifth one you call "play." Explain.

PINK: Yes, I call it play, and think of it as the ability to find joy. It's a sense of humor. It's an understanding of games. And I write a little bit about the videogame business. I think that hardly anybody over 35 understands how incredibly important this industry is, and how much it is teaching folks a new grammar, a new vocabulary. I also write about how one of the most successful free videogames in the last three or four years has been a game called America's Army, which is a free download and is created by the United States Army. The U.S. Army is recruiting using a free downloadable videogame, because it's recognizing that videogames have become a language in which you have to speak to potential recruits. Sure, you can appeal to patriotism and job training and all that sort of stuff, but ultimately recruits want to know what it's like to serve in the Army. And one of the best ways to do that is with a video game. By the way, this video game has had something like two million downloads. So now the United States Army is in the video game business. And, incidentally, General Motors is now in the art business.

UBIQUITY: And how is that?

PINK: The head of General Motors North America is a guy named Bob Lutz, a legend in the auto industry, and when he took over the top job at General Motors a few years ago a reporter for the New York Times asked him how his would differ from that of his predecessors, and he said, "It's more right brain. I see us being in the art business -- art, entertainment and mobile sculpture -- which coincidentally also happens to provide transportation." So GM thinks it's in the art business, and the U.S. Army is in the video game business. So something kind of freaky is happening, when these relatively traditional institutions are entering realms that you would not expect in the least. That's play.

UBIQUITY: And then we come to the sixth and final skill, which you call "meaning" -- and by which you mean what?

PINK: "Meaning" is the ability to pursue the transcendent, to find purpose. I really think that throughout American culture, American baby boom culture, there is this widespread search for meaning and purpose and transcendence that you see in everything from 10 million people meditating, 15 million doing yoga, the success of books like "The Purpose Driven Life," and so forth. People are in an age of abundance, when there is a decent amount of material well-being, they're recognizing ever so slowly that a bigger car or a bigger house, a little more money doesn't bring lasting satisfaction. And the search for a sense of meaning and purpose is being accelerated, as with many things in American life, by baby boomers, many of whom are grappling with the unhappy and daunting fact that they have more of their life behind them than ahead of them. And that sort of knowledge can really concentrate the mind and make baby boomers think, OK, what am I here for? Why was I put on this planet? Am I going to do something that matters? Am I going to leave a legacy? And I think when you multiply those kinds of profound questions by 40 million people, you have something very, very significant going on.

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Dan Pink's website is <http://www.danpink.com>

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