



The hot topic these days at Building Leaders, Inc. is “Brain Training”. It is hardly a secret that a healthy body requires physical exertion in order to achieve positive results. Thus it should come as no surprise that the brain also requires exertion, albeit of the mental kind, in order to achieve mental fitness. You may ask if it is even possible to train your brain. It is a fair question!

After many decades of study, scientists concluded that the brain becomes less flexible as humans get older. There is some truth in this, but not the whole truth. The reality is that the brain is a powerful and complex organ capable of very dramatic change even in adults. Sharon Begley’s book, Train Your Mind – Change Your Brain, traces the study

of the brain and describes how research has proven the ability of the mind to adapt to adverse circumstances.

More importantly, her book traces research showing how you can literally think your way to a better brain. She traces the studies of a scientist who documented proof of brain changes occurring merely from various forms of training that re-wired the brain. Modern treatments enable stroke victims to rewire their brains and regain movement in affected parts of their bodies. Another treatment enables sufferers of obsessive-compulsive disorder to overcome their compulsion for irrational behavior. Particularly significant in the work with OCD patients was the discovery that physical brain changes were caused solely by changes in thought and the training of the mind.

The list of successful studies in neuroplasticity continues to grow and treatment is available for conditions such as depression, injury, stroke, dyslexia and more. Fortunately, most of us do not suffer from ailments requiring serious intervention. We are just stuck living in a world of negativity and fear. The significance of neuroplasticity, for most of us, lies not in treatment for crises, but as a cure for the everyday challenges of life.

Begley provides powerful lessons in brain theory you can employ to be a happier person. The beautifully written prose was a joy to read. She tackles a lofty subject and brings it to you in plain readable English. More importantly, she delivers a message important for the ages, particularly the one in which we live today.

The book takes you on a learning journey through the history of brain study and leads you to the endearing happiness, humility and wisdom of the Dalai Lama. He had wondered what physiological effects occurred to Buddhist monks during their meditative states and, as you might expect, a team of scientists was eager to take part in research that would provide answers. The findings revealed amazingly powerful physiological brain responses as a result of meditation. In other words, the monks are simply training their minds with thoughts and physical changes in their brains are actually taking place.

The astounding realization made by the research team, working with monks reticent to participate in a study using electrodes to measure brain waves, was the dramatic gamma ray production occurring in the frontal cortex of the brain during meditation. (Gamma ray production

is apparently a good thing!). The question arose “Was this display in the frontal cortex of the brain a genetic predisposition of these monks?”. In order to test this hypothesis, a control group was used.

One of the research scientists, highly skilled in meditation, led a group of University of Wisconsin volunteers in the practice of compassion meditation. As you might expect, the results were conclusive. The volunteers, after only two weeks of training in meditation, showed significantly elevated gamma ray production in the frontal cortex as a result of the meditative practice. There is more!

As the study was conducted, a serendipitous discovery occurred when the researchers noted that elevated gamma ray production in the frontal cortex of the monks continued even when they were not engaged in their herculean meditative sessions. In other words, their practice had literally re-wired their brains for happiness. If you have ever looked at a Buddhist monk, you may have noticed that they seem to display a perpetual smile.

In the end, any significant change in life takes discipline and persistence, whether it is a physical achievement or a mental one. If you want to be in solid physical shape you need to structure a regimen of diet and exercise. If you want to be in solid mental shape, you need to structure a regimen of mental exercise and water. (The brain loves water!)

This is an important book for a serious student of life and one I am thrilled to have read. Amazingly this book came to me as a recommendation from Amazon books. By tracking my past online purchases, their system amazingly told me that I might like this book! I endorse this book as one of the best reads of my entire life.