

THRIVING IN MIND: MANAGING PREFERENCES TO MAXIMIZE EFFECTIVENESS

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(This excerpt is an edited and condensed version of Chapter 11 in Thriving in Mind. For the complete chapter, with graphics and the implications for team management and development, see Thriving in Mind)

There are two basic approaches to managing our preferences - each of which can contribute significantly to enhance our personal effectiveness. Both are discussed below. Maximum benefits come from using the two approaches in combination.

Leveraging Your Strengths

From the perspective of brain dominance know thy self and to thine own self be true can be translated as: leverage your natural preference. The best and surest way to do this is to energize or "charge" yourself by starting each day over center using your natural lead, in a context that suits your extraversion/introversion.[1]

Not surprisingly, different people need to engage in very different, highly specific activities to insure this self-charging.

A person with a natural preference in the Basal Left mode will be energized by attending to something that allows him to think/act in a proceduralized manner sequencing, organizing things that lend themselves to being sequenced; or by using well organized materials.

A person with a natural preference in the Basal Right mode will be energized by attending to something that allows him to focus on the presence or absence of harmony and act to maximize the authentic sense of connection and harmony between people and voices, instruments and / or colors in the environment.

A person with a natural preference in the Frontal Right mode will be energized by attending to something that allows him to use his visual-spatial imagination in combination with metaphoric thinking to be creative; generate a positive vision for the future; invent a new solution, strategy or product.

A person with a natural preference in the Frontal Left mode will be energized by attending to something that allows him to use his logical skills to evaluate and prioritize options; or make decisions concerning complex but known problems.

Highly extraverted persons will be energized by doing an over center task in a noisy, crowded, fast paced or competitive environment.

Highly introverted persons will be energized by doing an over center task in a quiet, out of the way, or slower environment with fewer distractions.

The 70% who have a balanced level of inner wakefulness, will be energized by doing an over center task in a moderate stimulating environment which does not require the person to function at either of the above extreme.

Significantly, individuals and teams who start their day over center, using their natural preference in the appropriate context for at least an hour, report their whole day goes better. There is no doubt about it, starting each day with activities that use our natural lead makes a critical difference in the quality of our life.

For best results structure your time so that for the first 1 to 2 hours each day or work period you do only those tasks which allow you to use your gifts in a context suited to your arousal level, without interruptions. Additionally, as you move through your day, if you structure it so that at least 50% of what you do utilizes your preference in contexts that match your arousal needs for high, moderate or low stimulation, you will find you feel much stronger. And, finally, if you end your day at work doing a task which uses your preference, you will be leveraging your lead to help you make the most of your evening whether it is spent alone or with friends or family.

Managing Your Weaknesses

Our only completely natural strength is in our area of preference. All other types of thinking are relative weaknesses, even if we have developed significant competencies in applying them. This is most true of our greatest natural weakness - the type of thinking diagonally opposite our natural preference. So it is best to remember, when planning our day and week and life, that regardless of how much we develop or use a mode if it is not our natural preference it does not enjoy the same natural energetic advantage.

For this reason, consciously managing when and how we attend to people and tasks that engage our weaker type of thinking is important. Fortunately, six strategies have been shown to be highly effective when managing tasks or persons that draw heavily on one of our non-preferred types of thinking. Not all are equally appropriate or even possible in a given situation. However, taken together as a set of tools, they provide us with an empowering alternative to being frustrated and exhausted; and/or doing a less than an optimal job. Significantly, these six strategies fall into two very different categories or approaches: redesigning the task or job and requesting help. Some of you may be more comfortable with one approach than the other. However, to optimize your options and effectiveness, we suggest you read and become familiar with both approaches, and all six strategies.

Redesigning Tasks

Generally speaking there are two types of redesign possible: formal and informal. When your evaluation of your job has revealed that the fit between your preferences and the tasks you are expected to perform is poor, it is often a good idea to consider a formal redesign such as a job or career change.

The technical wizard (Introverted Double Frontal with a preference for the Frontal Right) who finds he has been promoted into administration (a Double Left job) as a reward for being an excellent researcher may well determine that he wishes to request a demotion back to research. The entrepreneur (extraverted Frontal Right) whose company has been successful may find she is doing more administrative and operational work (Basal Left and Double Left) to keep pace with

the demand for her product and decide to restructure or sell out in order to be "free to pursue new interests" compatible with her Frontal Right lead. The Basal Right Nurse who entered nursing to help people and has moved up the career ladder to a supervisory position (Double Left) may request a demotion to staff nursing or switch to a career in Human Resources or Public Relations.

When the degree of fit is moderate or better, the necessary redesigning may be accomplished through one or more less formal means. These strategies, along with the four for requesting help are the strategies we recommend people use to manage their weaknesses on a day in-day out basis.

When you have a degree of competency in the required non-preferred task, such informal redesigning may be accomplished by Sandwiching the task which uses your non-preferred competency between two tasks each of which draw upon your true preference

The power of this highly effective approach is based on energy management. Using your natural preference energizes you. Using your non-preferred, developed competencies exhausts or fatigues you. Assuming your system begins the day in neutral, by first doing something you prefer, you energize the system. By using one of your non-preferred types of thinking immediately afterwards, when the system is "charged" you tend to experience the fatigue or drain as simply taking you back to neutral. If you follow this step with another task using your preference, you will again move "up" – to a positively charged position.

By contrast, engaging in non-preferred tasks randomly, without charging the system before and after, can result in much of the day being spent between a "down" or negatively charged position and neutral. Indeed, this conscious ordering of tasks allows you to conserve a valuable resource – you.

Strategies for Managing Your Weaknesses

First, Accept Your Weakness, then

Redesign the Task

- 1 sandwich it between two strengths
- 2 schedule it at a peak energy time

Request Help

- 3 select and use a modal mentor
- 4 trade the task to a modal expert
- 5 delegate the task to a modal expert
- 6 hire a modal expert

Another informal strategy involves conscious Scheduling. Two effective Scheduling techniques are:

Schedule the non-preferred tasks at times of the day when you are generally, naturally "up"; and

Never schedule important non-preferred tasks at times of the day when you are generally "low";

Other informal techniques that you can implement alone; without help from another person, immediately prior to performing any task using any type of thinking other than your preference, include:

Remind yourself just before starting the task that it is something you don't prefer, but are choosing to do as part of a total package for which you have accepted responsibility.

Do a deep breathing exercise immediately prior to doing the non-preferred task in order to energize your brain.

When the above techniques are inappropriate or insufficient, your best step is to request help.

Requesting Help

Requesting help is generally the best solution when the task or person requires you to:

- * use your greatest weakness (e.g. your Achilles heel); or
- * perform in a context in which doesn't suit your arousal level is challenged.

Moreover, requesting and using help is not something to be ashamed of. Most jobs, especially problem-solving or management jobs, are whole brained. To do them completely or well, one needs to use every type of thinking, which we now understand, means use 4 different persons with complimentary preferences. For this reason, highly successful companies today formally sanction executives and employees helping each other through team leadership, self-managing teams, and whole-brain team building.

Generally speaking, there are four ways to enlist the help you need:

you can find a mentor whose natural strengths, extraversion or introversion match the task facing you;

you can trade the task to a co-worker whose natural strengths, extraversion or introversion match the task facing you;

or, if you are a manager or supervisor,

you can delegate the task to someone who already works for you and whose natural preferences and arousal level include those required; or

you can hire a new employee whose preferential pattern includes the type of thinking or arousal level in which you need help.

One advantage of using a mentor is that, with their help, you may develop a reasonable degree of competency and thereby become more self-sufficient. The disadvantage of using a mentor is that for some time you will need to devote more, rather than less, time to your non-preferred type of thinking, listening to and observing your mentor in action as well as practicing your new non-preferred language and skills.

By contrast, trading, delegating, and hiring an expert to do your non-preferred tasks, frees your time and energy to do what you do best.

When deciding which strategy to use, consider both the immediate and long term implications of each option. Generally speaking, if the task required is "generic", one which you will need and can use to your advantage almost everywhere, such as negotiation, you may want to use a mentor so that you can learn to do it for yourself and have it in your personal "tool kit". If the task is less generic then it may well be wiser to trade or delegate it to an existing staff person with the appropriate preference/arousal level; or hire someone who can do it well.

In summary, managing your own preferences involves:

designing your job so that at least 50% of what you are expected to do utilizes your personal mental preference in contexts that match your arousal needs for high, moderate or low stimulation, and

managing those tasks which require the use of your non-preferred types of thinking or arousal levels through redesigning how and when you do them, or requesting help from someone with the necessary mental preferences.

These latter actions are critical. They make it possible for you to do your job well while not pushing you mental Achilles heel. Moreover, used in combination with the guidelines for communicating clearly at work and home (Chapter 8), these strategies allow you to transform uncomfortable or unpleasant situations into rewarding and energizing ones. In other words, they set you up to thrive.

[1] For more information on Introversion and Extraversion see Appendix F. Physiologically, extraversion equates with a low internal level of arousal that drives a person to seek stimulation so they will wake up enough to enjoy life. Introversion equates with a high internal level of arousal that causes them to function best in quieter environments. To learn more about how our arousal level affects our lives, listen to KBA's audio taped series on Increasing High Performance [To identify your natural arousal level (i.e. your extraversion/introversion)] take the BTSA and read your own Feedback.

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