



The Left/Right Brain Connection

BY KENYA MCCULLUM

Denise is an accountant who loves numbers and always looks at the fine print of everything she does. She's good at memorizing facts, and loves nothing more than watching documentaries on the History Channel.

Jennifer, on the other hand, is imaginative and constantly immerses herself in artistic endeavors. She expresses

herself well and when she thinks about an issue, she can easily see the big picture.

We've met people like Jennifer and Denise and noticed their very different personalities and the different ways they look at the world. But what makes them that way?

Part of the answer can be found right between their ears.

WHAT ARE THE LEFT AND RIGHT BRAIN?

When we talk about the strengths of our brain, we're referring to which side of the brain is more dominant over the other.

Generally, when we talk about those who are left brain dominant, like Denise, we're describing analytical people who are extremely detail oriented. Left brained people tend to think in a linear fashion and work well with numbers. And like Denise, it's not uncommon for them to pursue careers that allow them to use numbers and tend to the finer details of things.

If you're more like Jennifer, chances are you are a right brain dominant person, meaning that you are imaginative and creative. Those who are right brained are also highly intuitive and they rely heavily on their emotions when processing information and making decisions.



BALANCING BOTH SIDES OF THE BRAIN

Like any other part of the body, the brain needs to be exercised in order to stay in tip-top condition. Because of our natural tendencies and interests, we generally exercise the dominant part of our brain regularly—but it's still important not to neglect the non-dominant side.

If you are dominant in one side of your brain over the other, there is a belief that somehow the other hemisphere has no role, but that's simply not true," said Dr. Susan DeVito, executive director of the Brain Balance Achievement Center. "We need both hemispheres of our brain to communicate with one another in order to express ourselves in each of the areas of function, and sometimes an overwhelming expression in one direction or the other really is showing us that the hemispheres are in balance."

BUILDING THE NON-DOMINANT SIDE OF THE BRAIN

In order to ensure that the non-dominant side of the brain is functioning the way it should, we should exercise it—just as we would with our muscles.

Although it may sound daunting, this process doesn't have to be a drudgery that involves doing things that we absolutely hate. So, if you're a right brain person, you don't have to start doing trigonometry in order to build the left side of the brain; a left brain person doesn't have to become Picasso or Shakespeare to build the right hemisphere of their brain.

Building the left brain. One good way to build this side of the brain is by playing memory games, where a number, picture or letter flashes on the screen and you have to recall it. You can also build the left hemisphere of the brain by doing spelling exercises, or learning a foreign language, because language lives in this side of the brain.

Building the right brain. You can build up the right side of the brain by doing art projects, learning to play a musical instrument, keeping a journal or taking a dance class. Also, this side of the brain is associated with emotions and communication skills, so working on recognizing and controlling your emotions, as well as improving your nonverbal communication skills, like eye contact, can go a long way toward building up the right brain. ❖

Important Things to Remember About Your Brain

It's never too late to build a part of your brain. Although our brains are completely developed by the time we reach 25, that doesn't mean that you can't keep on improving parts of your brain.

"Every time you learn something new, you basically are developing an area of your brain that hasn't been challenged before," said Dr. Marie Pasinski, a neurologist at Massachusetts General Hospital. "The brain that you have is the result of how you've used it over a lifetime, and the beauty of it is that it's never too late to remodel your brain, restructure it, and build up new areas. In many ways, we truly are the architects of the brain that we have. It's never too late to change your brain for the better."

It's best to treat both sides of your brain with care. Whether you are a left brained person or a right brained person, your entire brain should be nurtured.

"Both sides of the brain are equally important and should be loved and treated well—and used," said Dr. Carolyn Dean, author of *365 Ways to Boost Your Brain Power: Tips, Exercise, Advice*.

When you build one side of your brain, the other side also reaps the benefits. "Any skill you build, when you're thinking of how your brain is working, is going back and forth across the left and right cortex like a pinball," said Tony Dottino, Founder of the USA Memory Championship. "When you start learning something new, it is amazing how the plasticity of your brain will start bouncing back and forth to left and right, so what you're doing as you learn one of your weak spots is building up your strong spots and giving them a new perspective and dimension."