



DIALOGUE WITH DAN GOLEMAN

author of *Emotional Intelligence*, *Primal Leadership* and the forthcoming book *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*

and our CEO Amy Elizabeth Fox

Conducted on September 6, 2013.

Q In your new book, *Focus*, you talk about great leaders needing to engage *Exploitation* and well as *Exploration*. Why are these two functions so critical and how are they different?

A These are the two main approaches to business strategy actually. In *Exploitation* you take something you are very good at and you get better and better at it. You progress and you find success in fine-tuning what you do. This is what made Microsoft so profitable for so many years. The problem is that the world in which what you do so well paid off doesn't stay still. Things move, things change and *Exploration* is what you then need. *Exploration* is the strategic approach that says "What's new? What's innovative? What is the unfilled niche today?" It is Apple in the years that it overtook Microsoft. It means coming up with new ways of doing things with innovation, with creative insights, and with new approaches to business that are going to pay off in new ways in a new reality.

Q How can organizations build the capacity for *Exploration* as that seems to be a key strategic task in times of fast paced change?

A One of the difficulties of getting to *Exploration* is the seduction of *Exploitation*. It is so comfortable and easy and pleasing to keep making money in the same old way. In a sense this is a trap because as with Microsoft or Blackberry the ways that you made money that are so pleasing aren't going to last.

What helps an organization be better at *Exploration* and what helps key individuals who are strategic thinkers get better at it is to realize that they have to detach, to let go of what seems such an obvious path to success. They need to start looking at creative alternatives and that means from an intentional point of view, from a focus point of view, not just concentrating on what has been

working but letting your mind roam free and gathering as much information as you can, as much input as you can, about the new reality.

In the creative process there is this paradox in that our best ideas come to us from the bottom up brain. This is a part of the brain that works automatically, that is a voracious information processor but is out of our awareness. That's why our creative insights come to us in off times because when we are really focused and effortfully concentrating on a goal or on a task or on a problem our focus suppresses this part of the brain. We don't get the messages.

But in our downtimes, our off moments such as when we are taking a shower or going out for a walk or when we're meditating, whatever it may be then we hear the small voice that says "Hey, put these two things together, these two elements and you'll have a novel combination". That is a creative insight and we are only going to let it reach our awareness if we get into another mode of focus. That is when the creative innovations, the *Exploration* starts to bear fruit.

Q I love how much of your work focuses on neuroscience and how it can inform our views on leadership development. Through your work on emotional intelligence many of us have come to understand the amygdala and its role in fight or flight protection. Dan, you were just talking about the bottom up part of the brain. In the new book you focus on this different aspect of brain functioning, this bottom up part of the brain, especially the insula. Why is the insula important for leaders to understand?

A The insula is extremely important in understanding how attention works in the brain and how to use it in the most effective way. The insula is the part of the brain

that monitors our organs and our entire body, so when you tune into your “gut feeling” you are using your insula.

The bottom up brain, this enormous information processor, has no direct connection to the verbal cortex, the part of the brain that thinks in words. However, it has enormous connectivity to the GI tract, to the gut. We get its input often as a felt sense, an instinct that “this feels right” or “this doesn’t feel right.” The insula is a rudder in life and it’s a rudder in business too because no matter how good the numbers may look there may be something in your life experience that tells you “Hey wait a minute we shouldn’t go ahead with this deal” and that’s information too. So the insula helps us track that. It’s absolutely crucial for very effective self awareness.

Q In the book you talk about self-awareness as the one meta-ability that all leaders need to have. And you posit a link between high self-awareness and smart decision-making. Can you explain how this works?

A It’s counter intuitive because self-awareness is the most elusive of all the leadership competencies we find. In fact many organizational competence models neglect self-awareness. You just don’t see it but it is absolutely crucial. There was just a study published of traders in London and it showed that those with the highest self awareness made about half million pounds a year and those with the lowest self awareness about one hundred thousand. I believe that self-awareness makes a huge difference in business. What’s hard is that we cannot see it explicitly in another person the way you can see relationship skills; these are the most obvious in the leadership set. With self-awareness you have to deduce it from how people behave.

But in our own lives it is extremely important that each of us have a heightened Self Awareness because it’s crucial for self-management. For example. it is key to being able to keep your eye on the goal and not get distracted by all of today’s technology interruptions: emails, texts, cell phones. We have this barrage of temptations and distractions coming to us because of our apps and our tech devices. That’s a new business reality. It means we are besieged, and our attention and focus on that one thing that we are supposed to do at any given moment of work is continually threatened. Its having strong self awareness that lets you monitor that and see , “Is my attention drifting off into that thing that’s seductive or interesting but not important, or can I stay on task.?” So self-awareness is fundamental to getting the job done.

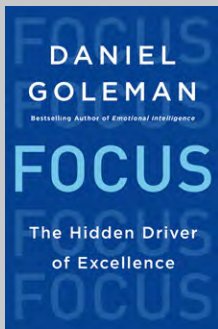
Q You said the emergent research on focus has caused you to rethink emotional intelligence. Specifically in the new book you talk about the importance of a leader attuning to an inner emotional reality and to that of those they seek to inspire. Can you share with us what’s new in your understanding of emotional intelligence for leaders?

A The brain intermingles its circuitry for attention and emotional intelligence. This made me realize my model of emotional intelligence could be reformulated in terms of attention: Inner focus includes self-awareness and self-management; Other focus include social awareness and relationship management.

Highlighting the hidden role of attention in these competencies can help with coaching and cultivating strengths in them, by more explicitly assessing and training the underlying attention abilities.

“Leading attention requires these elements: first, focusing your own attention, then attracting and directing attention from others, and getting and keeping the attention of employees and peers, of customers or clients.”

—Daniel Goleman



The author of the international bestseller *Emotional Intelligence* returns with a groundbreaking look at today's scarcest resource and the secret to high performance and fulfillment: attention.

For more than two decades, psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman has been scouting the leading edge of the human sciences for what's new, surprising, and important. In *Focus*, he delves into the science of attention in all its varieties, presenting a long-overdue discussion of this little-noticed and underrated mental asset that matters enormously for how we navigate life. Attention works much like a muscle: use it poorly and it can wither; work it well and it grows. In an era of unstoppable distractions, Goleman persuasively argues that now more than ever we must learn to sharpen focus if we are to contend with, let alone thrive in, a complex world.

Goleman analyzes attention research as a threesome: inner, other, and outer focus. A well-lived life demands that we be nimble at each. Goleman shows why high-performers need all three kinds of focus, as demonstrated by rich case studies from fields as diverse as competitive sports, education, the arts, and business. Those who excel rely on what Goleman calls smart practice—such as mindfulness meditation, focused preparation and recovery from setbacks, continued attention to the learning curve, and positive emotions and connections—that help them improve habits, add new skills, and sustain excellence. Combining cutting-edge research with practical findings, *Focus* reveals what distinguishes experts from amateurs and stars from average performers. Ultimately, *Focus* calls upon readers not only to pay attention to what matters most to them personally, but also to turn their attention to the pressing problems of the wider world, to the powerless and the poor, and to the future, not just to the seductively simple demands of the here and now.

Q You introduce the notion of three areas of focus: inner, other and outer. Can you elaborate on each?

A Inner focus includes self-awareness and self-management, which of course is half of Emotional Intelligence. Other awareness refers to empathy and relationship management – social intelligence -- which is the second half of Emotional Intelligence. I co-designed a 360-degree assessment tool with the HayGroup, the Emotional and Social Competence inventory, for helping executives get better at these abilities.

And then I describe Outer focus, mainly systems level awareness. I argue that all three kinds of focus are essential to leadership. Outer focus is being aware of the larger forces that are at work that impinge on what you are doing, and that determine the success or not of what you are trying to do and the way you are trying to do it. So it might be organizational dynamics. It might be new technologies that are going to shake up your market. It might be new environmental realities. For example, earlier today I read in the Times that the movement among institutions like universities to divest companies that are upping the carbon in the air is really gaining traction. In certain sectors you better be

aware of this and think about sustainability and investment risk. In other words leaders don't just need inner awareness and empathy and getting along and managing other people but also a keen sensitivity to the larger forces at work.

This notion, that companies need to be alert to, and scanning their external environment, is featured in a recently developed organizational assessment instrument created by McKinsey & Company called the Organizational Health Index.

Q In the book you took about organizations struggling with a negative climate. What is a negative climate and how do so many organizations wind up with one and at what costs? What can one do about that?

A Negative climates develop on teams within divisions and within entire organizations. We see so many organizations struggle when employees lose focus and get disengaged. There are two main internal states in people who report feeling negative in an organization. One is being so stressed that you are continually frazzled and the other is that you are so alienated and disinterested that you are constantly bored.

Alienation may come for example from having a run-in with a superior where the boss is rude, abrasive, demeaning and so on and then thereafter you are alienated. You just don't feel that you belong in this family anymore although you are still occupying a desk .. Or it may be that you are underchallenged – that your job does not engage either your best abilities nor what you care about most.

Of course the antidote to these two negative climates varies according to what the particular diagnosis is. In the case of the employee who is disinterested or alienated it's quite different from the employee who is overwhelmed.

So to start with the people who are disengaged, the answer is to find something that will bring them back in, that will motivate them, something that will have them bring their whole selves to work. It may be changing the definition of what they are doing, of what their job is or finding something they have a personal passion for and helping that become part of what it is they do. Or it may be a leader who can articulate an inspiring mission that actually resonates with that person, but it has to be an authentic resonance from the heart to the heart. There are various strategies for disengaged employees.

There has been a whole movement in the organizational literature in the last decade helping organizations to identify what their employees strengths are, what kind of tasks give them energy, and to let them inform their career path. Many companies these days are helping manager's to investigate the natural strengths of their employees and to use these to inform their career path. There may be a leader who can articulate an inspiring vision that actually resonates with that person and you assign the employee to one of the leaders active projects.

For those who are overly stressed you have to ask the question are we really giving them enough support or are we asking too much of them. Is there a way in which we can lower the bar and actually get better productivity...questions like that.

There has also been some wonderful work coming out of Tony Schwartz and the Energy Project on how to help employees manager their energy (mental, physical, emotional and spiritual) to stay engaged and invested in their work over time.

Q I loved the notion of a leader's aperture. Why is cultivating a strong scanning ability so important for leaders and what is its role in innovation?

A Aperture is using your attention like the aperture on a camera, zooming in or zooming out. It means you are flexible about what you see and you are not stuck out there or in here. You can switch as needed. Zooming in is seen, for example, when you make a presentation and you are picking up how the people are reacting so that you can fine tune what you say or how you say it or when you say it. Zooming out is absolutely crucial as well. This is taking a wide scan and learning to pick up on the environment, on what is going on in the outer world to make sure your team, your unit or your company is responding to the changing eco-system in which the organization exists.

Q What happened personally that led you to write this book on Focus?

A A couple of things led to my interest in this area. First, I noticed personally this tension that I mentioned between getting what you have to do accomplished and all the temptations of email and texts and so on, all the seductions of attention that are constantly pulling at us. And also noticing how it intrudes in relationships. You go out to a restaurant and you can see a couple spend much of the dinner reading their texts and emails. Or you can see an entire family and everyone is looking at an electronic screen the entire time. Or at least half of them are. I wanted to understand what is happening and I realized that our attention is being besieged.

As a science journalist, which is my background, I am also tracking new research and in the last two or three years there has been a real explosion of findings about the attention circuitry in the brain. And I thought this had huge implications. And this is very similar to why I wrote Emotional Intelligence because at that time there was a wave of new research findings on the brain and emotions, which to that point had been little understood -- and yet were crucial in our lives and in our work places. Here I am doing the same thing for attention that I did for emotions in Emotional Intelligence.



To pre-order *Cultivating Focus: Techniques for Excellence* CDs:
<http://morethansound.net/shop/cultivating-focus-techniques-for-excellence>

Q Let's follow up on this theme of attention, of focus. I can't help but think of one of your earliest books, *The Meditative Mind*. In that book you wrote about mindfulness practice and its power to improve our ability to direct our attention. How can mindfulness help with *Focus* or in building the skill of directing your attention?

A Well in that first book which I wrote way back in 1980's I said that meditation is a retraining of your attention. That is the way cognitive science looks at what you are doing when in meditation you make a pact with yourself to focus your attention on this one thing, or to maintain a mindful attentional stance to whatever arises in your awareness. If you think of the mind as a mental gym, the basic move in meditation is a direct analog to working on a Cybex machine and doing reps to build your bicep muscle. Every time your mind is wandering and you bring it back you are strengthening the neural circuitry for attention. Meditation is a very direct method for upping your ability to focus.



Erica Ariel Fox, author of *Winning From Within™*, and Dan Goleman, author of *Focus*, at the recording session for their video in the series *Leadership: A Master Class*.

Q For close to thirty years you have been a champion of mindfulness and the importance of mindfulness for leaders but also for society at large. In the last number of years, in part due to your pioneering scholarship and teaching, many companies are increasingly teaching mindfulness to their employees. What do you hope will be the benefit of this and what is the link between this and your new work on focus?

A Dozens of companies now offer mindfulness training to their employees, and the research suggests this makes good sense. It not only strengthens the neural circuitry for attention, but also tends to make people more empathic and helpful. And that can only lead to a more positive, productive organizational climate.

But apart from work, I also hope that schools will include attention-enhancing exercises for kids. In preschoolers, this increases a child's learning readiness: they are more able to pay attention to the teacher, concentrate on their work, and manage their emotions and feelings so they are better behaved. This cluster of abilities – called cognitive control – turns out to predict their health and career success better than their childhood IQ or even the economic status of their family of origin.

Q Beyond just individual capacities to increase focus I wondered, too, if there was an application of these principles to the effectiveness of teams to work together and generate collective intelligence and to organizations as a whole?

A It is not just teams but organizations as a whole that share attention and distribute attention. If you think of the different divisions of a company -- marketing, finance, R&D and so on -- you are talking about different ways people deploy their attention and then share across those siloes what they do, what they learn, to create a collective intelligence which is the intellectual

capital of that group. Teams are a kind of microcosm of that where the attention of everyone on the team creates a collective intelligence that is greater than any one person. There is a Japanese saying that “All of us are smarter than any one of us” because of this ability to expand the collective bandwidth of attention and to share what we learn from these different channels.

You see attention operate at the group level in a team. Self-awareness means that a team can understand its own dynamics and self-correct. For example a team can see that a problem is simmering and deal with it rather than let it blow up, or it can use its self-awareness to create high level of harmony and collaboration which is one mark of high performing teams. It can use the analog of empathy to understand other parts of the organization or key groups that impact the team, and understand those people’s point of view, so that you can interact more effectively or mesh with them more smoothly or influence them to get what you need. So attention operates at every level whether it’s a team or a company or society as a whole.

Q *It’s very touching for me that even as your new book, Focus is being published our President Erica Ariel Fox’s new book, Winning From Within™, will also be published by Harper Business this Fall.*

I know you and Erica conducted a wonderful conversation last Spring about her work that is now part of the Leadership: A Master-Class Series produced by our media partner More Than Sound. I know, therefore, that you are familiar with Erica’s model of the “inner negotiators” and her focus on negotiating first with yourself.

Can you explain how this critical inner monologue among the Big Four (Thinker, Warrior, Lover and Dreamer) all play out as leaders try to maintain their focus and get results in the world?

A As Erica suggests, each one of these parts of us has a different kind of focus. Each of the Big Four has a different expertise. In order to operate on all cylinders we need to be as good at each of these as is possible and to integrate them. To bring the information that each of them gathers into a central understanding and to marshal that information for whatever decision may be at hand. This is why I believe Erica’s method will make a great contribution to leadership development helping people to move fluidly among these dimensions of focus and develop a more centered and integrated approach to how to deploy them. ■

“The best leaders have systems awareness, helping them answer the constant query, where should we head and how? The self-mastery and social skills built on self and other focus combine to build the emotional intelligence that drives the human engine needed to get there. A leader needs to check a potential strategic choice against everything she knows. And once the strategic choice gets made, it needs to be communicated with passion and skill, drawing on cognitive and emotional empathy. But those personal skills alone will flounder if they lack strategic wisdom.”

—Daniel Goleman