

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

INCREASE YOUR RELATIONSHIP IQ WITH NEUROSCIENCE

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

Contributors: Michael Platt, PhD, Director, Wharton Neuroscience Initiative; James S. Riepe University Professor of Marketing, Neuroscience, and Psychology, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania.

THE GOAL:

Apply findings from the latest neuroscience research to improve your personal and work relationships.

NANO TOOL:

People are fundamentally social. Our ability to build relationships and connect with others increases our happiness, improves our health, and helps us succeed in business and in life. Neuroscientists have recently identified key areas of the brain where that ability resides, and their studies of this social connection network have yielded actionable insights into how we can maintain the health of the social brain, turn up its activity, and improve our relationships. In fact, as we increase our social connections, we also increase the size and integrity of the social brain network. These findings have important implications for leaders, teams, client relations, sales, and more.

One key finding is the role of hormones and other chemicals, some of which can enhance social brain function, social attention, and social bonds, and some of which can diminish them. Oxytocin, which enhances bonding, is an example of the former. Testosterone, which impairs social attention and increases selfishness, falls into the latter group. See the Action Steps below for specific ways to harness your social brain to improve your relationship IQ.

ACTION STEPS:

The following five steps can help you harness your brain's social connection network and in turn help you build deeper and more numerous relationships.

- 1. Make eye contact.** This is the critical first step in establishing relationships and building trust. It gates the flow of information into the social brain that is necessary to begin building emotional and cognitive connections, and also releases oxytocin, which regulates activity in the social brain. Conversely, failing to attend to others reduces the information flow into the social brain, impairing mutual understanding and limiting the potential for working together.
- 2. Get in synch.** Coordinating behavior with others leads to greater synchronization of your brains, increasing liking, understanding, empathy, rapport, helping, and successful negotiations. You can increase interpersonal brain synchrony by subtly mirroring others' behaviors or even by building together with Legos. (Believe it or not; adding a public goods game enhances this.)



3. **Be a team player.** Relationships flourish when we focus on our commonalities and not our differences; believing in shared goals and identity amplifies trust and understanding. Empathy and mutual understanding are strengthened when we believe we're on the same team. Even wearing the same team colors can rescue an impaired brain empathy response.
4. **Fight the power.** Believing you are more advanced in the hierarchy turns down your social brain, making you less attentive and thereby less able to take the perspective of others. This makes it difficult to understand their goals and intentions, and makes it more challenging to cooperate.
5. **Make new connections.** To further grow your social brain and its capacity to connect with others, use it. The health and integrity of the social brain increase when we engage with new people. Whether it's a company barbeque, community softball league, or the local farmer's market, the interactions you will have will enhance the capabilities of your social brain and give you new powers once you return to work.

HOW LEADERS USE IT:

Former FBI agent Chris Voss shared in *Never Split the Difference* that when words, voice tone, and body movements are in synch, people feel less threatened and are more willing to open up. As a negotiator, Voss specifically repeated one to three keywords in the last sentence spoken by the other person, describing the technique as "one of the quickest ways to establish rapport."

Warby Parker, the designer eyewear retailer, brings new hires onto the team by providing tangible and intangible elements that represent the company and its team culture. They include a copy of Jack Kerouac's "Dharma Bums" (the company was named after Kerouac characters); Martin's Pretzels (the founders often ate them when they were establishing the company); and a gift certificate for a Thai restaurant (it was the only one open late at night when the company was in its early days). To further encourage team building across the organization, Warby Parker uses a "Lunch Roulette" tool each week to randomly select groups of four employees (never more than one from each department) to have lunch together.

Ari Weinzwieg, CEO and co-founder of Zingerman's gourmet food company, embraces a unique philosophy that relies on collective decision-making rather than the standard corporate hierarchy. A firm believer in Robert Greenleaf's theory of Servant Leadership, he opens executive meetings — and the company's books — to all employees.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- "Chameleons Bake Bigger Pies and Take Bigger Pieces: Strategic Behavioral Mimicry Facilitates Negotiation Outcomes," W.W. Maddux, E. Mullen, and A.D. Galinsky. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44, 2008. Describes the results of two experiments that revealed that mimicking increased the likelihood of obtaining a deal in a negotiation, and that it created more value and claimed most of that additional value, though not at the expense of the opponents.
- "Servant Leadership: How to Put Your People Before Yourself," Cheryl Williamson, *Forbes*, July 19, 2017. Offers four approaches for developing servant leadership individually, in teams, and across organizations.

- “Ten Examples of Companies with Fantastic Cultures,” Sujan Patel, *Entrepreneur*, August 15, 2015. Provides examples from a range of industries with one factor in common: how employees are treated and what level of ownership and trust they are given is a key part of company culture.
- Michael Platt teaches in Wharton’s [Leveraging Neuroscience for Business](#) Impact.

ABOUT NANOTOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton’s Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.