

## Become CEO of your brain in the coming year

### Now's good time to shed bad habits

By Andrea Kay

I've been trying to figure how to end 1998 on an auspicious note, inspire the heck out of you as we enter 1999 and answer all the letters I didn't get to. The best I came up with was to surprise, perhaps shock you, by explaining how you can become a CEO in 1999. Not of a company necessarily, but of your own brain.



M. O'Brien

First, a quick lesson on the brain. That gray matter between your ears has several functions: It interprets sensory impulses, coordinates and controls your body and allows you to exercise emotion and thought. It is also the place that houses habits, the ones you used in 1998—and developed way before that. That's how they became habits. Some of those habits that are in your brain will not be useful in 1999. In fact, they can stop you from getting a promotion or a better job, even thwart your company's growth.

Take for example, the habitual way you react to your boss. Let's say you're in a meeting, and she says "This is how we need to handle the XYZ project." Do you offer your opinion—which will not be popular—but do so anyway because in your heart of hearts, you know if you don't bring it up, the XYZ project will only have mediocre results?

Or do you automatically think, without even noticing that you're thinking it: "How is this going to look to her and the rest of the group if I challenge this? Will I not be seen as a team player? Like I'm not supporting the vision of the company? What if I'm wrong?" Or, that you won't have much influence anyway, so what's the use? If this is going through your head in a matter of seconds, you'll probably decide it's better to go along to get along.

Here's how that hurts you and everyone else. By not offering the insight the company is paying you for because a habitual way of thinking keeps you from speaking up, you help your career and the company stay average. Neither of you will go far. No one will notice you. Nothing innovative and creative will take place at the company.

Let's look at another example. Perhaps you have a habit of putting in 10, 12, 14 hours of work a day and still never get it all done. Yet, you keep on doing it, pushing yourself harder, even while the things you say are most important to you like relationships at home and your health are suffering. As demands on your time increase, the more hours you work and faster you move. This is another habit that won't be useful to you or anyone else in 1999. In fact, you might not survive at the rate you're going.

The good news is you can change your mind and so-called programming that's in your brain. According to Michael O'Brien, author of *Profit From Experience*, the brain has phenomenal power. "It's estimated that a single human brain has the switching capacity of the entire U.S. telephone network," he says.

You can, in effect, be CEO of yourself. It starts by practicing the art of consciousness. That means you start consciously noticing when you go into autopilot. "Raising consciousness means not just thinking, but thinking about thinking—noticing—and managing—the workings of your mind so your mind won't run away with your life like a startled horse," Dr. O'Brien says.

This gives you the capacity to observe your programming—how you're feeling, thinking and reacting in a meeting with your boss—and to choose which programs to run. Changing also includes imagining things the way you want them instead of how they are now and learning to see things with a new perspective.

To do this, you have to wake up your brain. So as you ring in the new year, get into some new habits. Practice the art of consciousness so you're in charge of your brain instead of it being in charge of you. Think about habits that hinder you. Pay attention to what you do what works and doesn't work and what you're ignoring. Ask yourself if you're moving too fast and who could support you in slowing down. Consider alternative ways of thinking and being. Try them out.

You might make mistakes. But as Dr. O'Brien also points out, to err is human. To notice is smart.

  
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