Sebastian
Purps-Pardigol

LEADING WITH THE BRAIN

The 7 Neurobiological Factors to Boost Employee Satisfaction and Business Results

campus

Leading with the Brain

Sebastian Purps-Pardigol is a leadership coach and organisational advisor based in Hanover, Germany. Renowned neurobiologist Professor Gerald Hüther encouraged him to combine the insights of brain research with management training methods. Together they founded the non-profit project ›The Culture Change Code‹ (www.the-culture-change-code.com).

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The 7 Neurobiological Factors to Boost Employee Satisfaction and Business Results

Foreword by Gerald Hüther

Translated from German by Romana Love

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For
Paul & Harry

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Foreword by Gerald Hüther

It has now spread: In the course of their lives, everyone has acquired specific skills, collected certain experiences, and acquired specific knowledge in certain fields. All that makes a person who he is. But during his or her life, he or she still has the possibility to learn something new, to acquire new knowledge and new skills, and to make new experiences. So it's possible throughout a lifetime to evolve and to grow beyond oneself. This potential is created in the internal organization of the brain from the outset. No one can fully develop all of his potential, but everyone has, no matter how old he or she is, the possibility to use this potential to acquire new knowledge and to acquire new skills. Nobody can force him, but only invite, encourage, and inspire him.

However, many leaders have a problem with this, not only at school, during training, or at the university, but also in businesses and organisations. That is why so much of what students, apprentices, or employees know, and therefore can apply, stays far below the possibilities. The teachers in the schools, the instructors in the companies, and the professors at the universities can live with this. The continued existence of their institutions is not jeopardised. However, businesses and companies work differently. They cannot survive in the market, and they can go bankrupt if their employees do not want to evolve. It is no longer sufficient if, every now and then, someone will tackle issues, think along, and take responsibility. Companies today, especially in our culture, need employees who want to get involved and for whom it is a pleasure to explore what else could be improved.

In principle, companies and organisations do not work much differ-

ently than a brain. They also have a potential that is greater than expressed in their balance sheets. In principle, a lot more can be achieved, however, not by applying more pressure or even better control. With these measures, short-term successes can be reached. In the long term, this strategy undermines the commitment and willingness of the staff to develop their potential they possess within. As a result, they will only do what they need to and what they are paid for, and that's not enough for the long-term success of a company.

So the question is whether and how it could be better. It is this question I have been exploring with Sebastian Purps-Pardigol for several years. Not in theory, but in practice. We have been looking specifically for companies that, somehow, managed to do it, in which leaders successfully invited their employees, encouraged and inspired them to unfold the scale of their potential. Where employees have found their pleasure for thinking independently, rediscovered their joy for joint creation, and cheerfully participated in a much different way, growing beyond themselves.

We both had experienced how hard it was to describe the important elements of implementing new findings in lectures and workshops. All these theoretical considerations don't gain sufficient persuasive power, until they can be made verifiable, tangible, and comprehensible through practical examples. That's why we have been searching for such practical examples of successful cultural change processes in organisations and companies for several years. We did not want to use the organisations advised by us as case studies to avoid a subjective coloration and distortion. So we had to be attentive and to find companies that appeared to be appropriate to us. Sebastian Purps-Pardigol has spent a lot of time with the companies in question to talk to business leaders, managers, and employees. On the homepage, www.the-culture-change-code.com, we presented a selection of practical examples, and I am happy and grateful that Sebastian has put together the findings and insights of recent years and provided them to our dear readers in this book. In this book, he describes the mystery of how such a change of previous management and relationship culture in companies and organisations can succeed.

Even though the chosen ways and strategies might be different in each company, it becomes clear everywhere that one thing is especially important: Employees feel they are no longer used as objects of ratings,

arrangements, measures, or the interests of their executives. They want to be seen as subjects, who are trusted. There are no special methods or techniques used in these companies by the executives. It is rather a different, special mind-set that allows these executives in different ways to invite, encourage, and inspire their employees to develop their own potential. This is where the secret of success can be found: You cannot do it, you first must find out by trial and error how to do it, how to do it better than before, and that it primarily depends on the improvement of relationships between all parties. Wherever a relationship culture is based on appreciation and care of each other, where all employees of a company pull together and pursue a common goal, the economic success will sooner or later result from this collaborative effort.

System theorists call it »Self-optimisation of living systems.« They are currently trying to understand the phenomenon underlying this general principle: In every living system, the involved subsystems (in a business these are the employees) organise their relationships in such a way that the required energy expenditure for the preservation of the relevant system is as low as possible.

However, in many companies, this principle becomes evident in its negative expression: Because the relationships between managers and their employees, and often among the entire workforce, are so problematic, a lot of energy is used in these companies to compensate for these friction losses that result from these disturbed relationships to some extent. This may work for some time; however, such a relationship culture is not sustainable.

For several years, economists have been searching for new strategies that bring back momentum to the economic development. Their search is directed to the identification of the next innovation base to bring the desired upswing. By this, they mean pioneering inventions that determine the main direction of economic development for decades. The Russian economist Nikolai Kondratieff discovered the long waves that such innovations have on the global economy. Since the late eighteenth century, he was able to prove 5 such cycles supported by innovation bases, so-called Kondratieff cycles. The first cycle began with constructing the steam engine, the second with the production of steel and the invention of the railway. Developing electrical engineering and chemistry initiated

the third; the fourth was borne by the invention of the automobile and petrochemicals. In the 50s of the last century came the driving force for the fifth cycle from Information Technology. Since then, economic growth was determined by the increase in the information sector. This cycle ended with the global recession at the beginning of this millennium.

Since then, the economic policy makers have been looking for the next innovation base. Meanwhile, they have identified the health sector. The sixth Kondratieff cycle will now be supported by improved productivity in dealing with health and illness. This area now sees a lot of vigorous investment in medical technology, molecular biology, wellness, and everything investors perceive as being relevant for health.

Perhaps, more health, more comfort, and increased productivity cannot be obtained through more diagnostics, medical technology, fitness equipment, and health clinics. Maybe to help people stay healthy, feel good, learn for a lifetime, and stay productive, something is needed that cannot be achieved with such policies and procedures. For example, employees in companies do not lose their pleasure in their own thinking and the joint creation. In this case, it would not be sufficient to introduce new technologies. Instead, the co-existence of people must be designed in such a way that everyone is invited, encouraged, and feels inspired to develop his talents and gifts, and thus his potential.

Then the basic foundation of innovation that determines our lives and our economic development in the next decades would not be a new discovery or invention, but one of particular attitude, a different self-image, and a different way of dealing with each other and with our nature.

Then growth would be made possible by avoiding the many friction losses. Then we could grow infinitely, without becoming larger and consuming more, just like our brain shows us: by improving and strengthening relationships between all parties.

I wish, dear readers, that Sebastian Purps-Pardigol can invite, encourage, and inspire you with this book to become more conscious of your own change-journey. The awareness we have already – we just need to apply it.

Göttingen, September 2015
Gerald Hüther

A symbiosis of science and economy

»The time is: 3 minutes and …« – the thunderous applause of over 3,000 spectators drowned out the rest of the words of the stadium announcer. It was May 6, 1954, a rainy day in Oxford. For the Englishman Roger Bannister, it was the most important moment of his life, because he was the first man in the world to run the mile in a time of less than four minutes. For decades, many athletes from all around the world had tried to break through this magic barrier. They had all failed.

But in the following years, something remarkable happened: Dozens of other runners finished below the four-minute mark. You might think they had adopted Bannister's training methods. But that was not the case, because Bannister had no special method. He was not even a professional athlete; instead, he was a prospective neurologist. The other athletes seemed to use Bannister's success as an »it-is-possible« example. They subsequently could rise above and fall below the four minutes.

»There have to be even more companies who have already succeeded!« In 2011, the neurobiologist Prof. Dr. Gerald Hüther and I discussed whether such a role model effect is also possible in the world of business at a joint hike with views of the Werra loop, a river near his home in Göttingen, Lower Saxony. We had already conveyed the knowledge of modern brain research – each of us in our own way – to many companies. And I advised and coached organisations in the long-term during a process of change, but now, Gerald Hüther and I were looking for a way in which we could start the cultural change by an effective impulse for many additional companies.

Entrepreneurs and decision-makers in many industries had already

approached us with the urgent desire for change and development. In our discussions with many of these protagonists, we often experienced that they needed a little more than inspiration and knowledge. They understood well when we explained that connection is a deep-rooted, new, raw biological basic need, and every human being bears the desire for participation within them, or human action can be explained through the influence of inner pictures. A crucial piece of the puzzle was still missing: We needed »Roger Bannister« companies that could serve as role models for other companies and executives to give that last »It-is-possible« impulse. We needed companies that had already created a culture, based on people-oriented management. Companies whose workforce comes to work happily and enthusiastically, enabling stable economic growth. With such models, as Gerald Hüther and I knew, we could bring companies and leaders what they were longing for: such a culture to become reality in their own company.

The need in many companies to change something is evident and the economic pressure is not the only thing that has increased. The curve of absences related to mental health has been increasing steeply for years. Burnout and stress symptoms are now the leading causes of illness-related early retirements. The Hamburg-based corporation Unilever calculated in 2011 that the total costs accrued by mentally ill people add up to 7 million euro in the headquarters alone with its 1,100 employees.

The 1,500 corporate leaders interviewed for the IBM Global CEO study reported their companies were in such an economically complex phase that they rarely had matching strategies for the challenges lying ahead.

However, they believed – the CEOs responded in unison – they could overcome these difficult times better if they could use the creative potential of their employees. But how can they manage this if those miss work more frequently?

We didn't want to use the companies that were advised by us as »Roger Bannister« models. We thought that »one's own children are always the most beautiful ones. – We would not be objective.« Therefore, we started to look for other companies with lighthouse character that have employees who are measurably happier, healthier, and more loyal, thus are more successful than their competitors. It was a long search, but in the end, we found numerous examples. I spent a lot of time during the past four

years studying the recipe for success of these companies in more detail.

In my role as an organisational consultant, executive coach, and author, I met the owners of organisations with 40 employees and CEOs of companies with a 50,000-man workforce: fruit juice producers, hotels, law enforcement agencies, fashion companies, chain stores, cosmetics companies, manufacturers of special machines, winter service providers, and many more. During my long conversations with bosses and employees, I was especially interested in these questions: What conditions had the decision makers of these companies created for their employees? With what inner attitude had they created these? Which different behaviours had they developed, so people in their companies could grow beyond themselves?

I experienced employees who cried when the manager left their companies, people who set up working groups in order to »preserve the good spirit« of the company in the long term, a student who suddenly received a hotel management position from the boss of a hotel group and achieved historically good results, a workforce that jointly developed a corporate strategy that resulted in a sales growth of 70 percent, a company that increased its sales from 1 billion to 1.6 billion after the employees had made it the focus of their attention.

Over the years, I was able to recognise recurring patterns in these companies. What I saw was the manifestation of the neuroscientific findings I had learned from Gerald Hüther and other researchers, whose humanistic attitude has influenced me sustainably. Science, I realised, provides pertinent explanations for economic success. I explain these patterns of success in this book for you. Let yourself be inspired!

Chapter 1

Big Bang – You are the person with whom change begins

»If someone aspires to change within a company,
he is well-advised to start changing himself first.«

Bodo Janssen, Managing Director, Upstalsboom hotel group

»Good morning! My name is Bodo Janssen, and I have this vision of happy people.« Two things are obvious about the Frisian man with his hands in his pockets. First, he is not wearing a dark pinstripe suit like most other speakers at this Economic Conference in Berlin. Second, he begins his lecture without rehearsed opening phrases, without a PowerPoint presentation, and without finely honed rhetoric. Bodo Janssen says what is close to his heart and in a way that hardly any listener can escape its spell. He talks of happy employees, collective retreats in monasteries, and the personality training he undergoes with his team. By the time Janssen almost casually mentions that sales in his hotel chain, Upstalsboom, doubled in just over three years and that guest recommendations increased by 98 percent, it is so quiet in the room you could hear a pin drop.

It's spring 2013, and Bodo Janssen is the last speaker before I take the stage. After I finish, we barely have time to exchange business cards. A few weeks later, we meet in the restaurant of his Berlin-based hotel. I want to understand how he got his hotel group to where it is today: One of the most desirable and profitable employers within the industry.

As in many other conversations I have had with leaders of companies that maintain successful corporate cultures, one thing quickly becomes apparent: Even here, the change within the company started with a personality change in Janssen. Surprisingly open, he told of devastating poll results among the chain's employees, of years filled with sleepless nights when his first company encountered economic issues during the

establishment phase, and of life-threatening days when his family faced extortion. That changed him in a positive way.

Other executives attempted to guide their employees in a new direction, though usually at a greater personal distance. I had experienced a memorable instance in Berlin a few years earlier. After the neuroscientist Gerald Hüther and I had taken up joint work, word spread quickly: We wanted to uncover the secrets behind the achievements of successful corporate cultures. Institutions outside the field of the economy had heard about us. I was living in Zurich, when I received a call from a German Federal Ministry. At the annual Head of Department exam, they wished to hear what we had discovered about admirable corporate cultures in the previous years.

My visit to the Ministry should shape me significantly, albeit differently than I expected.

Two months later, I presented some of our experiences to the Berlin Ministry. After I had finished, the heads of the departments looked at me, puzzled. With sharpened pencils and a clean sheet of paper, they wanted to know: »How can we achieve a culture just like the one you described? What exactly should we do differently in our ministry?« Something about these questions irritated me. I felt like Jamie Oliver being asked for a spaghetti recipe. In my mind, I compared all the executives Gerald Hüther and I had talked to or advised: They were all people who had managed to achieve measurable and noticeable changes in their enterprises. Suddenly, I became aware of the difference. It was the inner involvement; it was enthusiasm. That's what was lacking in the faces of my listeners this morning. »Don't change anything in your ministry for now,« was my intuitive response. »The first sensible step would be to change something within yourself. As long as you, as an individual and a team, don't know where you want to go and why this is important, you should not even begin.«

The response to my advice in Berlin was rather retentive. A Secretary of State, who participated months later in one of my open trainings, was amused when I told her about it. »In these organisations, people are more used to obtaining concrete instructions for action rather than a recommendation for self-reflection,« she said. »The professional life shows that mostly reactive action prevails there, and the time for long-

term considerations is not sufficient.«

The observation of such an obvious »non-involvement« of the executives was an important indication for me. It explained what I have seen so far in successful corporate cultures. Something I took for granted until now: All executives who successfully created a human and economically thriving culture started this process by working on themselves, first. It seemed as if there was a common unspoken understanding among these people. A long time ago, Mahatma Gandhi put it like this: »Be the change you want to see in the world.«

What do we want to tell our grandchildren?

Bodo Janssen's early years at Upstalsboom were difficult. Initially, with developing his own company, he wanted to step out of his father's »big shadow.« In 2005, he returned to the family business and later took over sole leadership of the Frisian hotel chain. The finances were solid, the customers were happy, and so was the staff. At least, that's what Bodo Janssen believed. But when he employed a new head of HR, Bernd Gaukler, in 2009, Bodo Janssen learned the following: »Mr. Janssen, I have the feeling I am working for two companies, here. One company is the one you describe. The other company is the one your people are describing to me.« Gaukler suggested an employee survey, saying, »However, I may be wrong.«

A few months later, a devastating result became apparent. »If our employees graded us back then, the results would have come back as poor to very poor,« says Janssen. »The statements were clear: The dissatisfaction among the employees had much to do with the leadership and the executives,« Gaukler reports. Accustomed to success, Janssen, as head of the company, was stunned. He retreated for a few days to the seclusion of a monastery to process the feedback of his chain's employees.

Bodo Janssen learned early in his life to let go. As a child of wealthy parents, he was the victim of a serious crime in 1998. At 24, as a student, he had been kidnapped. His captors demanded a ransom of millions. Again and again, they staged mock executions. His kidnappers put him on a chair,

placed a bag over his head, trained a pistol at his neck, and released the trigger. Whether they were playing Russian roulette, or whether the gun was never loaded, Janssen doesn't know. »Successively, I let go of unimportant things in my life,« says Janssen. »At the beginning of this torment, I still entertained thoughts like, ›Now I won't make it to my next university lecture,‹ or, ›I just bought this nice, new car.‹ Every time they conducted one of these mock executions, I modified these ideas and reached a greater depth.« In what became for him, as he says, a »crucial and formative period,« he learned to distinguish the essential from the inessential. Since then, it has been easy for him to separate the former from the latter.

Many years later, in the monastery, this experience helped him with the realignment of his business. »What is essential?« This was his central question during the days he spent behind the sacred walls after hearing the devastating employee feedback.

While staying in the monastery, Janssen developed a personal mission statement. He also asked himself about which experiences in life touched him the most. Finally, he realised those were all moments when people were deeply happy and moved. »One day, when I am a grandfather, sitting with my two grandchildren on my lap before the fire, I do not want to tell them about great business results and operating margins,« says Janssen. »I would much rather like to talk about something that touches them. Something they may remember for a long time. I'd rather talk about how many joyful people there are in our organisation – because this is, unfortunately, not the case at the moment.« Therefore, Bodo Janssen decided, still in the monastery, to align the focus of his hotel chain to produce happy people!

With these thoughts, Janssen returned to his business. He incorporated his thoughts into the company's vision: The happiness of its employees became the corporate strategy.

»Initially, I did not believe him,« Bettina Cramer recalls. Cramer is Head of Administration for the holiday apartments at Upstalsboom and has been working in this field for a decade. Previous challenging experiences had taken their toll. »At my last employment, I had a catastrophic, choleric boss – not nice! And even at Upstalsboom, some things weren't all that good in the past. The employee opinion survey made that clear. I thought, ›Just because Bodo Janssen is a new boss and wants to do everything differently, I won't bring myself in immediately!‹«

That Bodo Janssen had gone to the monastery after the poor survey took many by surprise. »I thought at first, ›What kind of nonsense is that?‹« smiles Bettina Cramer. »However, when he returned, something had changed about him. That was the first time I thought, ›This guy does more than just talk. He indeed means what he says.‹ He understood what had gone wrong in the past. He recognised that he had to start with his own personality change.«

»At the beginning, I thought that all Mr Janssen wanted was to get our attention briefly,« remembers Anne Stickdorn, a banquet coordinator from one of the hotels in Varel near Oldenburg. »I would not have expected he was really serious about going down this path. For many years now, he has been implementing exactly what he says. Every one of us recognises that. That's why we trust him.«

Bodo Janssen focused on himself, first. »Initially, I set little behavioural goals and measured myself against whether I achieved them. Every day I worked on myself,« he remembers. »I spent a lot of time reflecting on my thoughts, my feelings, and my behaviour. Initially, I hoped to be calm and level-headed in all my decisions.«

Janssen's personal change was only the kick-off. He wanted to convey this experience to his employees, as well. »My time in the monastery was so formative it was important to share this experience,« says Janssen during one of our meetings in his Berlin hotel, while drinking green tea. The way he thanked the waitress at eye level, I could feel how important relationships are to him. »First, I invited all 70 executives to spend a few days in the monastery,« he says. »Sixty-eight of them followed my invitation.« In groups of 15 participants, the executives from North Germany started by spending two blocks of three days each in the Benedictine Monasteries in the South of the Republic. In the time to come, employees in non-leading positions could join, so they, too, could have this experience. »I was very happy when I was invited,« says lively sales representative Anna Heuer. »They were all talking so positively about the time in the monastery.«

»I was sceptical at first,« Bettina Cramer admits. »I belong to no religious group and, therefore, have no connection to a monastery. But after seeing the changes in our boss, I said to myself, ›Maybe there is something there for me, as well‹. As of now, I have been there three times.«

Inspired by his own time in the monastery, Bodo Janssen offered within the company curricula, which he leads himself. The curriculum includes three fixtures in which he works with a group of up to 18 of his employees on issues such as communication, personal values, or self-management. He leads up to five such groups each year. Those days are reminiscent of personality training, while at the same time increasing the connectedness among the participants, who equally represent the staff of various houses of the hotel group. »From the very beginning, I felt comfortable within the team and with all other participants,« says Ina Rogahn, Reservation Supervisor from the Berlin house. »Bodo Janssen managed to pick me up, so I wanted to get involved and develop personally.« Her colleague, Ursel Ortu from the Park-Hotel in Emden, adds, »The curriculum confirmed positively what I am doing and helped me to achieve my personal goals.«

Through his actions, Bodo Janssen not only gained the trust of his staff on his path towards »happy people,« but he also made his vision a reality. That perceived happiness increases when people get involved, he quickly understood. Rather than delegating from above, Janssen often integrates his employees into decision-making processes to give them an opportunity to participate. »In the past, a directive was given from above. Today, however, everyone is actively involved in all strategy development. That enables us to identify more with what we are doing,« says hotel director Jeanette Dedow from the Berlin house.

»I often experience a lot of appreciation from Bodo Janssen,« reports banquet coordinator Stickdorn. »Even though it sounds weird: We see him as one of us!«

»Frequently, he asks for our ideas on some issues. You can tell he subordinates himself and his opinion to the vision of happy people,« says sales manager Anna Heuer. »He gives me a free hand in many things.«

»If you let go, you have two hands free.« This is one of Janssen's favourite aphorisms. He repeated it in many of our joint meetings, and he acts accordingly. By now, Upstalsboom is almost fully led by staff, not by the head of the company. »They are doing a better job than I am, anyway,« smiles Janssen. He finds more fulfilment in helping the employees of Upstalsboom identify new ways in which they can continue to grow beyond themselves. Janssen realises not everyone is where he could be. »I assume that 25 percent of our employees do not even know what we

are doing here. We create an environment in which every individual can develop optimally.«

A young woman, not even employed full time by the company, enjoyed the advantage, as well. Yvonne Klein had applied only for an internship. The student wrote her undergraduate thesis on Upstalsboom and wanted to get to know the company from the inside. Janssen, however, who had recently closed one hotel, made an unusual offer: »How would you feel about re-opening our hotel and running it as a summer internship?« After a week of consideration, the student accepted the proposal.

»You mean a hotel you just recently closed, you want her to re-open again? And you want it to be organised by a student, who has never worked for you?« I asked him.

»Yes, exactly,« Janssen gushes with genuine enthusiasm. The highlight is this hotel had the best income in its 30-year existence within the same year.

»Where did you get your staff?« I wanted to know.

»Mrs. Klein found them all. Five people for a 40-room hotel. However, she took out the catering part and remodelled it into a B&B. This way, she can run it with only five employees and some external service providers.«

During her study in tourism, Yvonne Klein repeatedly gained experience in the field of the reception of hotels. This was experience she needed before she could take over an entire hotel on an island at Upstalsboom. »You won't get such an offer very often,« she tells me on a foggy morning in Borkum. It is spring 2014. Her season hotel has just reopened after the winter break. »In the last weeks, I gathered experience at the headquarters and at Park Hotel in Emden.« Bodo Janssen has developed a mentoring system for Klein. The Emden house and its hotel director are now the main contact points for the young boss when she has to perform tasks for which she has not yet found solutions. »For a week, I was introduced to all the processes in Emden. In the meantime, hotel director Schweikard and I regularly spoke on the phone. However, the biggest challenge is the regulars, who constantly like to let me know that things are not the way they were for the last 30 years,« Yvonne Klein laughs.

»For someone with your family background, it seems easier for you than for most other people to strive for the best,« I tell Bodo Janssen in one of our last conversations. »After all, you grew up in a financially