

MONTHLY MENTOR

“A” Player human capital leadership by

HUNT EXECUTIVE SEARCH

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For twenty five years, the Monthly Mentor has been a value added service to encourage our employer and candidate clients in their Personal & Professional Development.



HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR BRAIN AT WORK

By J.B. Hunt

“You won’t know what your brain can do until you test its limits and push beyond them. No matter how inefficiently you are using your brain, one thing is certain: It is the gateway to your future.”

~ Rudolph E. Tanzi and Deepak Chopra, *Super Brain: Unleashing the Explosive Power of Your Mind to Maximize Health, Happiness and Spiritual Well-Being* (2012)

Let’s face it: You’re getting older, and work isn’t getting any easier. If being asked to do more with less isn’t enough, advanced technology and a rapidly changing marketplace mean you must stay sharp to remain a competitive asset to your customers and bosses.

How can you maintain your edge?

While it would be nice to have a magic performance pill, your brain and behaviors ultimately matter most, playing key roles in maintaining health and wellness. As with physical-fitness programs, today’s high-potential leaders are focusing on brain fitness.

But widespread media coverage leaves many people confused about brain science: ***Do crossword and Sudoku puzzles really enhance brain fitness? Do blueberries and bananas offer adequate protection? What about nutritional supplements? Why are jogging and sleep good for the brain? Do specific computer games train the brain?***

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In 2007, scientists reached a tipping point. Significant breakthroughs linked physical and mental exercise to long-lasting cognitive improvements. The press trumpeted the benefits of neuroplasticity and neurogenesis, describing how the brain continues to evolve throughout our lifespan.

The marketplace responded with websites, subscription services and games to increase brain power. But in 2010, a BBC study announced: “Brain Training Doesn’t Work.” Shortly thereafter, National Institutes of Health (NIH) researchers refuted the British findings, citing a rigorous analysis of 25 general reviews and 250 clinical studies.

Scientists determined that several lifestyle factors increase the risk of cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s disease. Cognitive training, they found, was clearly protective against cognitive decline.

What Is Brain Fitness?

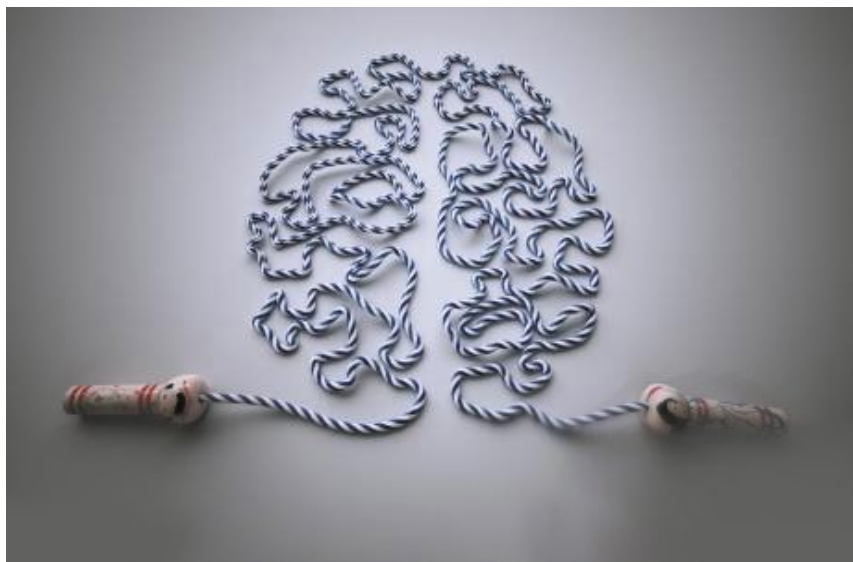
Fitness is measured by three key areas of brain function: cognitive, emotional and executive (how you execute a plan).

On any given workday, a healthy brain engages in numerous activities:

WORKING MEMORY: This type of memory allows us to hold information in our minds and work on it, as needed. It’s a temporary workspace with limited storage, and it’s susceptible to overload.

LONG-TERM MEMORY: You don’t record and retain every detail in your long-term memory. Events tagged as emotionally significant tend to be remembered, but almost never accurately. Our version of events also changes as we age. Thus, our memories are far from perfect.

SHORT-TERM MEMORY: More significantly, our short-term memory—for recent events, names and the like—tends to slow with age. With effort and training, we can improve this function.



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FOCUS AND ATTENTION: Your ability to focus on more than one thing at a time is useful, but also taxing and limited. Overloaded, you’re prone to errors.

EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION: Emotional tagging occurs behind the scenes in your brain, and the process involves conscious and subconscious functions. Learning how to control and manage emotions, including stress and anger, is crucial for personal and professional success.

COGNITIVE SKILLS: Cognition refers to how you understand, and act in, the world. Age, education and experience contribute to your cognitive abilities. You can take proactive steps at any stage of your career to improve these skills.

Boost Brain Power Through Tasks

“If you remain alert, a healthy brain will continue to serve you as you age. You should expect alertness, rather than dread of impairment and senility.” ~ Tanzi and Chopra

Start to notice the various ways your brain operates as you complete your daily routines and tasks. Awareness of your brain’s behavior can help you identify areas for improvement and training.

The brain thrives when it’s challenged, as well as by novelty and variety. It therefore needs a stimulating environment for growth:

- Vary your job responsibilities.
- Think outside the box.
- Be innovative at work.
- Do whatever it takes to avoid afternoon boredom.
- Add humor and fun to your schedule.



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- Incorporate a quick walk or exercise into your day to increase oxygen flow to your brain.
- Seek social interactions, including group efforts to solve problems. Harness the “wisdom of crowds.”
- Take a look at the new computer games designed to enhance mental fitness. Research those that have established track records.

Above all, don't allow your brain to be crippled by inertia. Ongoing passivity is a sure way to kill motivation and impair brain fitness.

*THIS MONTHLY MENTOR WAS CREATED BY
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