

## The Right Stuff?

Written by Margaret Evans

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As I sit down to write this column, it occurs to me that I am tired. Fatigued. Exhausted. To quote a favorite British mystery writer of mine, I'm flat out knackered.



Why, you ask? Have I over-exerted myself? Spent too much time at the gym? Too many hours doing yard work? House work? Any kind of work?

No, I'm just tired of thinking. Of spending so much time in my own head... not to mention the heads of others. Since I took up this blogging thing, my mind is a constant whirl of information and opinion that never seems to let up. Even when I'm away from my computer. Which is rare.

I hear a story on the radio, or read something in a magazine, or stumble over an interesting paragraph in the book I'm supposed to be reading myself to sleep with, or overhear a conversation in a restaurant where I'm supposed to be relaxing and obtaining sustenance... and my brain is immediately off and running. My fingers start itching for a keyboard as I glance around for the nearest computer screen. The mental gymnastics routine goes something like this: What are the facts? What are people *saying* about the facts? What do I *think* about what people are saying about the facts? What should I *write*

about what I think about what people are saying about the facts? (And, um... what were those facts, again?) Most important, of course... What Does It All Mean?

See? Flat out knackered.

So today, as I cozy up to my computer, jonesing to hit the blog circuit, dying to know what's "out there" that might not have been "out there" just an hour ago, desperate to see if I've gotten any comments on my latest post about Elton John and Hillary.... I'm resolved, instead, to sit quietly, take slow, deep breaths, and produce an orderly, coherent essay. By doing this, I hope to calm my frantic brain. It's a beautiful spring day, and a walk around the neighborhood would probably be more effective, but I am on deadline, so that's not an option...

Blogging is an addictive activity for people like me, who love to ponder "the big picture" and "what it all means," but have serious trouble reading a bank statement. Apparently, we are "Right Brain" people. I recently posted a visual test on my blog to help readers determine which side of their brains they use more – right or left. The test is simple, consisting only of the image of a female dancer, twirling in circles. If you see her twirling counter-clockwise, you favor the left side of your brain – the side that handles logic, details, facts, math and science, strategy-forming, and all the other practical stuff. If you see the dancer spinning clockwise, you favor the right side of your brain, which handles feeling, imagination, symbols and images, belief, appreciation, philosophy and religion, and "meaning."

Most of us start out seeing the dancer one way (usually left-brained), but can train ourselves, fairly easily, to see her both ways. I know this because it says so on the test, but also based on comments I've received from readers, friends, and family members who've tried it out. So far, I'm the only one I know who can only see the dancer the right-brained way, no matter how hard I practice. (And trust me, I've been practicing...)

That's me. All Right Brain, All the Time. I find this rather shocking and slightly appalling, as I'd

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always assumed I had a fairly well-balanced brain, despite my tendency to see the forest while missing the trees. When I shared my findings – and dismay – with my husband, he just laughed and said, “Sure! What did you expect? You’re the most right brain person I’ve ever met!”

Ah, to see ourselves as others do.

Certainly, there are good things about being a Righty. We are endlessly touted for our creativity, for instance, and our feel for the transcendent. Society must value these qualities, for there seems to be a whole industry devoted to helping people “tap in” to the right side of their brains, with books and courses and workshops galore.

What I want to know is this: How can I tap into the left side of my brain? Where are the books and workshops for those of us who are logic and practicality-challenged... who never met a concept we couldn’t grasp, a symbol we couldn’t deconstruct, a trend we couldn’t interpret... but who can’t balance a checkbook to save our lives? I don’t necessarily want to give up my Right stuff, but a little Lefty-ness would certainly bring some balance to my life and my family. As it stands, my husband (a bit more right than left himself, bless his heart) is stuck with all the heavy paperwork around here. To his credit, he never complains about doing it. I guess he knows the alternative would be much worse...

According to a 2005 article in *Wired* magazine, I need not worry too much about my Right/Left imbalance. *Wired* says I’m leaning in the right (ha ha!) direction for our times, as we are currently moving from the Information Age into the Conceptual Age.

Daniel H. Pink, writing for *Wired*:

*“If the Industrial Age was built on people’s backs, and the Information Age on people’s left hemispheres, the Conceptual Age is being built on people’s right hemispheres. We’ve progressed from a society of farmers to a society of factory workers to a society of knowledge workers. And now we’re progressing yet again - to a society of creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers.”*

Wow, that sounds great! Right up my alley. And it was written three years ago, so chances are, the Conceptual Age is already upon us.

Pink says that, while the Information Age has made us rich, that wealth has had an “ironic result.”

*“Liberated by this prosperity but not fulfilled by it, more people are searching for meaning.”*

Old-school thinkers and religious types wouldn’t find this result ironic at all; only natural. They might remind us that there’s nothing new under the sun, that storing up earthly treasures has a long history of failure to fulfill, that graven images almost never turn out to be God. Anyhoo... if it makes people feel better to hear their old truths couched in new language, that’s okay by me. Here’s more:

*“From the mainstream embrace of such once-exotic practices as yoga and meditation to the rise of spirituality in the workplace to the influence of evangelism in pop culture and politics, the quest for meaning and purpose has become an integral part of everyday life. And that will only intensify as the first children of abundance, the baby boomers, realize that they have more of their lives behind them than ahead. In both business and personal life, now that our left-brain needs have largely been sated, our right-brain yearnings will demand to be fed.”*

According to the article, I, in all my abstract, theoretical, (seemingly useless) right-brained glory, am perfectly poised to cash in on these newly-arisen boomer yearnings. (This is a good thing, as the Information Age has not yet made *me* rich, nor sated *my* left-brain needs.) To do so, I’ll have to supplement my “high tech” abilities (which, sadly, ain’t that high) with aptitudes that are “high concept” and “high touch.”

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□ *“High concept involves the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to come up with inventions the world didn’t know it was missing. High touch involves the capacity to empathize, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one’s self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning.”*

Understand the subtleties of human interaction? Elicit joy in others? Stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning? Piece o’ cake.

Just don’t ask me to do my own taxes.