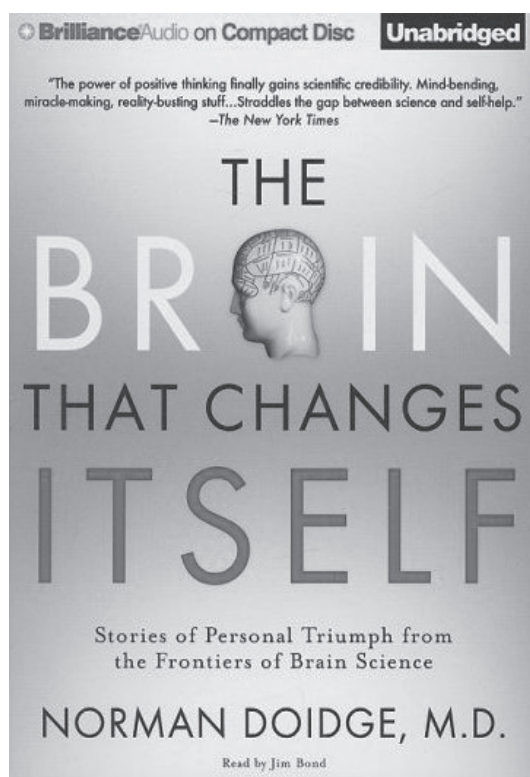


RESEÑA

Brain that changes itself

The Brain that changes Itself Norman Doidge, M. D.

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Although this book was written by a Doctor-psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, dealing with the synapses of the brain and showing motivating stories on Neuroplasticity, this is a novel book that goes beyond almost every discipline and art. It covers from Philosophy to Parenthood, from Rehabilitation to Management. The New York Times states that “The power of positive thinking finally gains scientific credibility”, and concluding that “our thoughts can change the structure and function of our brain”.

Chapter by chapter, the author shows several examples of people (researchers and practitioners) that have made important discoveries in several fields of brain plasticity. Dr.Doidge interviewed several people, so each chapter shows different approaches and breakthrough findings. This gives the book its first success, the myriad of points of view and frameworks. However, there are some salient patterns. First, almost all the interviewees are mavericks. Second, they have transcended the theory and have made real applications of their ideas, either through experimenting or developing new proven treatments, machines, pedagogies or methodologies. Dr. Doidge uses narrative third person singular, thus the book has an easy-to-read format. Besides, it is written for non-experts.

Several elements in the book are groundbreaking, so let us choose some of them and deal with their social implications. One of this applications that is difficult to understand is that the mindset creates or accommodates to the body, not being the other way around, as it was traditionally thought. Additionally, the eyes are not only to see, the ears are not only to hear, and so on. Some chapters show how people have seen through her tongues, scratch their cut arm by touching her face, and strengthen their muscles just by doing mental fitness. As Dr. Ramachandran argues “your own body is a phantom ... one that your brain has constructed purely for convenience” (as cited by Doidge, 2007:188). Thus, it is possible to change structured linear mental models that are less prone to humanistic management. For instance, Ricardo Semler, SEMCO’s CEO, thinks that “deprogramming adults” is one of their biggest challenges for getting closer to their 5.000+ employees (headquarters in Sao Paulo, Brazil).

Just imagine the possibilities for education within this approach. Piaget's "stages of development" can be re-formulated. Even the "windows of opportunities" can be transcended, since the book shows examples of people over their 60s that had suffered a stroke and could not walk, or not even talk. By teaching other parts of the brain to help their body to re-learn again, these people talk and walk as a second opportunity. How? Creating new synapses that made up new "brain maps" which did the job.

Hence, if you think that your child has 'complex behavior', be positive. The challenge is to intuitively think about which exercises, therapies or workshops you can design in order to let the mind create a new synaptic route for re-learning (look for information on the Arrowsmith program, Canada).

Another counter-mainstream idea of the book deals with love and sex. Normally, it is argued that sex is one of the pillars of a sound marriage, hence of a romantic-loving relationship. This adds up to the male-chauvinist society we live in, and the final result is a 'male-animal' that is hungry for sex, an "ever hungry brute, always demanding satisfaction-a glutton, not a gourmet", as Prof. Doidge wrote based on Dr. Merzenich's work on sexual plasticity. The result is we are sexual gourmets. Next time the your male partner acts like a cavern-being, giving this book as a gift.

Brain plasticity has found opposite versions for several topics based on the emerging 'science of unlearning'. Walter Freeman, Professor at Berkeley, concludes that "massive neuronal reorganization occurs at two life stages: falling in love and parenting" (as cited in Doidge:118). The challenge is how to get more unlearning experiences in life, what Abraham Maslow defines as "peak experiences", that are more often achieved by self-actualizers. Organizational climate, thus, can be altered.

Read this book as a first exercise of brain plasticity, as for sure it will challenge deep beliefs that you have.

