



Why Right-Brainers Will Rule The Future

A Whole New Mind, Moving from the information age to the conceptual age.

Daniel H. Pink,

Allen and Unwin, (2005), Australia.

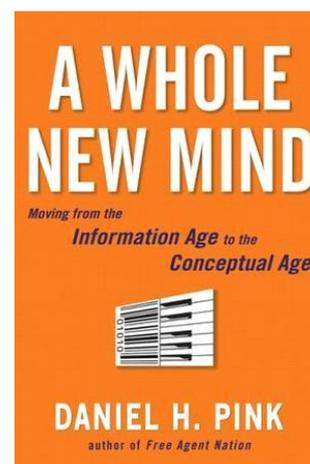
When I was given this book I didn't know the information age had ended and I was clueless as to what the conceptual age might be. Once I was confident that a few PC skills and university degrees had armed me for the future, but now I was anxious about what was next and where to get the new hardware. A clue lies in the subtitle for the 2006 edition: **“Why right-brainers will rule the future”**.

Daniel Pink's bio reveals he is a contributing writer for *Wired* magazine and his previous highlights include chief speechwriter for ex-Vice President Al Gore and a latrine builder in Botswana.

The first chapter begins interestingly with the author submitting to a MRI scan to introduce left and right brain thinking. He does simple exercises to show when the two hemispheres work to solve different problems. Put simply, **the left-brain works sequentially like reading text from left to right and focuses on a single correct answer. It works logically and analytically. The right-brain however works with intuition and apparently interprets things simultaneously and determines context like understanding facial expressions.**

Pink suggests that the passing of the information age, like the agriculture and industrial ages before it, is due to the wealth and affluence in western economies. He reasons that the information age and the knowledge worker (a term coined by Peter Drucker for those who acquire and apply analytic knowledge) is the triumph of left-brain thinking, where the rights of passage are marked by scholastic exam passes — those tests which require analytic and computer-like thinking and zero-in on a single correct answer. Schools focus their students on good grades, and he spells business success 'MBA'. The stereotypical jobs for knowledge workers would be law, engineering and computer programming.

Pink weaves a convincing picture with three major societal shifts that have contributed to the end of one age and entry to a new time, which he calls the Conceptual Age.



I. **Abundance.** We live in a time of material abundance. This information economy has created a world beyond our grandparents' dreams. From my own experience I can recall the excitement of the arrival of our Philips K9 which I doubt will ever be matched by my own children with the purchase of some other appliance or gadget. Most of our history has been characterised by scarcity and so as aspirations are realised, their ability to motivate must conversely diminish and open a new era for right-brain pursuits like meaning and life balance.

II. **Asia.** The word Asia represents more than a simple analogy for globalisation. The major feature is that a large portion of knowledge work can be exported to places like India with workers fluent in English and relatively cheap. The author provides numerous examples of legal, technical drawing work and even medical analysis can be accomplished offshore and delivered overnight via the Internet for a fraction of the cost of having the work done locally. The challenge, then, is to find work which cannot be exported and to adapt in the same way that last generations' blue collar workers have had to change with the end of the industrial era in the West.

III. **Automation.** As in the industrial age where machines replaced back-breaking physical work, technology is replacing left brain work. Tom Peters described software as a forklift for the mind. Gary Kasparov is possibly the world's best ever chess champion but was beaten by a computer in 1996 and despite a number of attempts has not managed to regain that crown since. Chess is claimed to be the quintessential left-brain activity requiring memory, rational thinking and with little room for emotion. Any job that requires routine and sets of rules can be automated. Further the monopoly of information held by knowledge workers has been ransacked by the Internet. As an example basic legal forms may be purchased online for USD14.95.

So a new Conceptual Age beckons where survivors and winners must embrace right-brain qualities which Pink describes as:

- a. **High concept** – the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to create beauty and craft ideas into something new.
- b. **High touch** – the capacity for empathy, understanding human interaction and finding joy pursuing purpose and meaning.

And for this shift the author proposes we need a whole new mind that uses both the left and right brain simultaneously. He claims to have spent years pondering this question and offers six high concept and high touch aptitudes to illustrate how right-brain thinking can be applied:

1. **Design.** Products, services and experiences must be more than functional: they must express beauty and be emotionally engaging.

2. **Story.** Our lives are filled with information and data and so the one way to differentiate an idea, product or service is to wrap a compelling story around it.
3. **Symphony.** As the information age begets focus and specialisation and white-collar work can be exported to Asia or reduced by software, this new age offers the opposite, namely the ability to see the big picture, create something new from disparate pieces.
4. **Empathy.** Conceptual agers require the ability to understand others, create relationships and care for others.
5. **Play.** Too much seriousness is bad for your wellbeing and your work. The ability to engage in play offers enormous opportunities to promote health and healing as well differentiate your product/service.
6. **Meaning.** In a world of material plenty, people are released from basic day-to-day struggle and therefore seek something to live for e.g. purpose and spiritual meaning. Expressions of this search might include the growth of yoga studios, self-help and spiritual bookshops and green products.

Each of the six attributes are supported with empirical studies and evidence from other authors and business leaders. I found Pink's examples engaging, convincing and found the whole book easily readable and enjoyable.

Why would SoFers read a secular book written by a technology writer?

1. SoFers are interested in the things that shape western civilisation and this book addresses changes to culture as well as business. Right-brain thinking offers evolution to a better and just society with personal purpose and meaning. These attributes are particularly useful in experiencing spiritual pursuits.
2. Many SoFers are successful knowledge workers. Left-brain thinking has brought us abundance, Asia and automation but the scene is so different now. Can you imagine advising your children/grandchildren not to become lawyers or engineers?

This book offers a holistic view of the world, new perspectives and hope for the future. Knowledge workers, parents and educators will find value in it. Read it and buy it for someone you know!

Brendan Clegg, Wellington