Coherence

The Secret Science of Brilliant Leadership

Dr. Alan Watkins

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Key Concepts

Achieving optimal performance in business and life is something many strive for but few actually achieve. The key to this accomplishment is coherence, a state where the mind and body become one. Coherence helps individuals become:

- **Younger**: Individuals can control their heart rate variability (HRV) with special breathing techniques in order to increase their energy and youthfulness.
- **Healthier and happier**: Mismanaged emotion often leads to disease and distress. Emotional mastery improves individuals’ clarity of thought, ability to learn, decision making, relationships, change management, leadership presence, and more.
- **Smarter**: Physiological and emotional coherence helps keep the brain focused under pressure, when it normally would shut down.
- **Successful**: Good leaders know that to change their results they must change their behaviors.
- **Influential**: Without communication and trust, developing strong, enduring relationships—both inside and outside work—is virtually impossible.

Summary

Introduction

Business leaders face incredible challenges on a daily basis, each taking its toll on their energy levels and ability to respond and react positively. In Coherence, Dr. Alan Watkins sheds light on the basic issues that can limit people’s overall effectiveness in the workplace and offers solutions that address the physiological and psychological
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factors that play a role. Watkins shows leaders how to become younger, smarter, healthier, and happier, giving them the ability to make exceptional decisions under pressure and achieve sustainable success at every level.

**The Great Performance Myth**

The human body works as the ultimate performance machine, but few people understand its impact or how to master it to achieve better performances. There have been many scientific examinations of the human system that explain these occurrences, such as the study of **physiology**, or the automatic information streams that occur inside people’s bodies.

The secret to peak performance is not relaxation or motivation—it is **coherence**, a state of maximum efficiency and super effectiveness, where the body and mind become one. Coherence is a state of stable variability. Too little variability, whether in the body or in business, makes people vulnerable to threats, whereas too much variability makes them unstable, erratic, and unpredictable.

*Enlightened leaders* are those who are able to facilitate the growth and evolution of their businesses as quickly and as painlessly as possible because they are coherent. To succeed in a **VUCA** (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world, enlightened leaders must be acutely aware of the four quadrants of the *Enlightened Leadership model*:

1. **Commercial performance**: Managing business systems and tracking revenue and profits.
2. **Market leadership**: Identifying business visions, missions, and strategies.
3. **Personal performance**: Discovering personal purpose and thought processes.
4. **People leadership**: Developing high-functioning teams and evolving organizational cultures.

**Be Younger**

In the modern world, people are busier than ever before. Most executives feel that being “burnt out” is just part of the job. To deal with daily demands, many become obsessed with time management; however, if people do not have enough energy to deal with their demands, then having extra time will not help them in the long run.

Energy is created automatically through the physiological processes that occur in the body at all times, with the majority coming from the heart. **Physiological coherence** is largely made possible through the conscious control of the heart via breathing. **Heart rate variability** (HRV) can accurately determine many traits in a person, including his or her productivity, performance, motivation, endurance, available energy, wasted energy, exhaustion, and more. HRV can also predict death and illness and reveal one’s biological age.

With the right lifestyle adjustments, people can change their biological ages and increase their HRV. Some simple adjustments include exercising, mastering emotional self-management, taking omega-3 supplements, and practicing yoga. Breathing exercises are also incredibly important for generating a rhythmic breathing pattern creates cardiac coherence. There are 12 aspects of breath that people can learn to control, the first three of which hold the key to coherence:

1. **Rhythmicity**
2. **Smoothness**
3. **Focus on the heart/location of attention**

In order to sustain performance at the very highest levels it is necessary to balance intense effort with the appropriate recuperation. It’s simply not possible to keep going indefinitely.
4. Speed
5. Pattern
6. Volume
7. Depth
8. Entrainment/synchronization
9. Resistance
10. Mechanics
11. Flower patterns
12. Special techniques

If we can’t distinguish between emotions then we have no emotional literacy and our health, happiness and performance will suffer as a result.

BE HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER

Eating, exercise, and emotional well-being are three vital aspects to maintaining a healthy body. Eating high-quality foods is the best way for people to get the nutrients and vitamins their bodies need, and exercising regularly makes their bodies strong and resilient, but emotional well-being, the most difficult aspect to pin down, is the most important factor of all. Mismanaged emotions can contribute to heart disease, cancer, strokes, and depression.

Leaders who develop emotional mastery achieve significantly better results both at work and in their personal lives. By understanding their emotions, leaders are able to:

- Improve their clarity of thought and ability to learn
- Improve the quality of their decisions
- Improve their relationships at work
- Facilitate effective change management
- Increase their leadership presence
- Improve their health and overall well-being
- Increase their enjoyment and quality of life
- Ignite meaning, significance, and purpose in their lives
- Improve their motivation and resilience
- Expand their sense of self

Developing emotional intelligence, greater emotional literacy, and emotional self-management results in emotional coherence. People cannot always change difficult situations, but they can change how they process them. Health and happiness will only occur when people learn to differentiate and manage their emotions.

BE SMARTER

Growing a business requires clarity of thought, but the content and quality of peoples’ consciousness are determined by their physiology. Under pressure, most people do not think straight and their HRV becomes chaotic, which can cause the frontal lobes of the brain to shut down.

To be smarter, people must wake up and grow up. Vertical development of adult maturity is the only way to make significant strides. Horizontal development, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experiences, is worth-
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while, but it only creates incremental shifts and does not result in expanded awareness or increased maturity. Meanwhile, vertical development expands individuals’ capacity, creativity, and productivity.

There are 10 stages of consciousness that human beings go through from birth through adulthood:

1. **Physical self**: One-dimensional; experience is dominated by physical needs.
2. **Emotional self**: Two-dimensional; emotions give depth to experiences.
3. **Conceptual self**: Three-dimensional; driven by language and labeling the world.
4. **Concrete self**: “Talk the talk”; behavior is driven by rules and defined roles.
5. **Transpersonal self**: “Talk the walk”; individuals’ interior worlds open up to include others.
6. **Integrated self**: “Walk the talk”; major development work occurs and emotional baggage is resolved.
7. **Pure being**: “Walk the walk”; consistent “being” state is achieved and spirituality is explored.
8. **Unity in duality**: Experience of a divine union, or “oneness” with an object (such as God, a lover, or an activity).
9. **Pure awareness**: True awareness of the self and others; transcends subject-object relationships.
10. **Non-dual**: Same as pure awareness but with an evolutionary spin; pure presence and blissful emptiness is achieved.

Levels one through five generally occur during the childhood and teen years, although many people never go beyond level five and almost no one goes beyond level eight. Each of these levels of maturity is more comprehensive than the one before, helping individuals deal more effectively with elevating levels of complexity.

Individuals’ quality of thoughts is very much dependent on their emotions and self-regulation. **SHIFT** skills allow people to move from negative emotions to positive emotions at will so they can access their best thinking when they need it most. **SHIFT** stands for:

- **S**top everything and shift attention
- **E**ngage the **h**eart and breathe
- **I**nduce positive emotions
- **F**eel emotions throughout the entire body
- **T**urn the brain back on

**BE SUCCESSFUL**

To generate better performances, whether in business, school, sports, or life, people must make the right behavioral choices. Unfortunately, many leaders are more interested in the end results of their choices than how they are reached.

Changing people’s behaviors is not easy. Performance appraisals are considered to be change makers, but they rarely work that way. Most people understand that pressure can improve their performances up to a point, but that eventually it impairs them.
Leaders need to understand the importance of performance across all four quadrants of the Enlightened Leadership model. Their long-term business needs must get as much attention as their short-term needs.

To future-proof their organizations, leaders need to differentiate five key pieces of corporate thinking:

1. Vision
2. Ambition
3. Purpose
4. Strategy
5. Governance

Once these key business principles are defined and mastered, leaders can turn their attention toward 12 performance-driving behaviors that make the biggest commercial difference and have the capacity to transform their overall business results:

1. Gathering information
2. Forming concepts
3. Conceptual flexing
4. Empathetic connecting
5. Facilitating interaction
6. Developing people
7. Influencing others
8. Building confidence
9. Communicating clearly
10. Being proactive
11. Continuously improving
12. Building customer value

By identifying their current proficiencies within these 12 key behaviors, business leaders can focus on specific areas for development that can significantly improve their performances.

**Be Influential**

Employee satisfaction and engagement are both very important factors for success. Positive professional relationships hold the key to elevated long-term performances. Failing to understand or appreciate the impact of individual or collective differences can result in failed change implementations. By taking the time to understand what makes their people tick, leaders can become more influential.

*Spiral dynamics* is a cultural assessment tool that gives leaders insight into the personal and collective value systems that can allow everyone on a team to understand one another’s motives. This can have a profound effect on productivity and performance. It can also shed light on both positive and negative decision-making tactics within an organization.
Holacracy is a practice for governing and dealing with complex dynamics within organizations. It replaces top-down and predict-and-control business paradigms and puts an emphasis on incorporating all four quadrants of the Enlightened Leadership model.

**FEATURES OF THE BOOK**

**Estimated Reading Time: 5–6 hours, 352 pages**

*Coherence* by Dr. Alan Watkins breaks down the physiological and psychological barriers that business leaders often do not realize are harming them and blocking their way to success. The book has many graphs, charts, and other figures detailing different theories and behavioral models. There are examples interspersed throughout the book to help clarify points. This book would be beneficial to current leaders or anyone who strives to be in a leadership position.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Dr. Alan Watkins** is recognized as an international expert on leadership and human performance. He has a broad mix of commercial, academic, scientific, and technological abilities. Over the past 18 years he has been a coach to many of Europe’s top business leaders and has helped companies treble share price, enter the FTSE 100, salvage difficult turnarounds, and establish market leadership in their industries. He has written two books and has three more in the works. He advised the GB Olympic squad prior to London 2012 and is continuing to work with them leading up to Rio in 2016. He has a three degrees and is a neuroscientist.
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