the human operating system

high performance—three levels: individual, team and organization

This book and the Senn Delaney culture-shaping process are designed to help you, your team and your organization create more success with less stress. It provides benefits at three levels:

For you as an individual—Leadership and life effectiveness

For your team—High-performance team dynamics

For your organization—Creation of a winning culture

These levels are interrelated. High-performance teams working together toward common goals create a winning culture. In such a culture, people are accountable, respectful, collaborative and resilient.

We have received a great deal of feedback over the years from people who have participated in our culture-shaping process. They tell us that, when applied, the concepts we present result in very real and meaningful benefits in their lives and careers. The changes they report include:

- Greater results and added satisfaction in life
- More success with less stress
- Better balance
- Improved relationships
- Greater resilience to change
- Better influencing skills
- Added leadership and life effectiveness
- Healthier, better-performing teams and cultures
the human operating system

There are a number of underlying principles to the Senn Delaney culture-shaping methodology. Possibly the most important is an understanding of what we call the Human Operating System. When the CEO of one of the largest computer firms in the world participated in this process, he observed that the reason computers around the world can work together efficiently is that they share a common operating system. He went on to say, “We now have a common understanding of a ‘Human Operating System’ that allows us to interact in more productive and healthier ways.”

Many of the experiences in the unfreezing session you attended were designed to give you real-time insights into the Human Operating System so that you can learn to deal with people and events more effectively. As you may recall, early on the first day, we conduct a rapid “handshake mill.” The purpose of that exercise is to give people an experience that instantly changes (raises) the level of energy in the room. This experience also introduces the first principle of the Human Operating System.

1. Energy: Managing personal energy is a key to healthy, high performance.

While human energy is subjective, it also is very powerful. Sometimes we feel we have plenty of energy to do what we need to do; other times, we feel short of energy both at work and afterwards, when we arrive home. There are certain people around us that seem to increase our energy, while others seem to drain it. We all have been on teams where energy was absent, or very negative, and results were poor and/or extremely stressful. We have also experienced teams with lots of positive, creative energy where results flowed easily.

Positive energy isn’t always the high or “hyper” energy, like in the handshake mill. While we need bursts of that occasionally, too much would eventually wear us out. We can also be very resourceful and productive with a much calmer, more reflective, creative energy. In a like manner, negative, non-productive energy can also be high and low. Worry and depression are examples of lower negative energy; anger and self-righteousness are examples of high negative energy.
In these very demanding times, at work and in life, we each need to be more aware of this first principle regarding energy. A noted leadership expert who deals with both athletes and executives contends that managing personal energy is more important than managing time. To do that, we each need to find ways to better create and direct positive energy in ourselves and in those we influence.

We can't begin to do that if we don't notice it. Since energy is a feeling, one tool we have to help notice our feelings is the Mood Elevator.

up the mood elevator

Learning to identify the quality of our thinking has a lot to do with something most of us see as unwanted distractions in our lives—our moods. Remember the Mood Elevator from the session. It is tied to the next principle of the Human Operating System:

2. Moods
Our state of mind (moods) determines:

• Our effectiveness

• Our quality of life

Most of us think of our moods as obstacles, things that get in the way of our effectiveness. In reality, moods are one of the most important tools we have in achieving results. The Mood Elevator is a barometer of the
quality of our thinking. Higher-quality thinking creates higher mood feelings. Lower-quality thinking creates low mood states.

“Fair warning, I’m in one of my ‘moods’.”

Have you ever been cruising along, having a nice day, when suddenly everything seemed to go downhill? Conversely, have you ever been dealing with tough, complex issues and yet you felt confident and resourceful?

Just as our thoughts fluctuate from moment to moment, so does the quality of our thinking. At the times when we are at our best, we tend to feel optimistic and confident. We see the best in others and in ourselves. During times like these, we would say that we are experiencing higher-quality thinking. At those times, our behavior is usually more effective. Things seem to work out better for us.

We’ve all experienced times like this. We may not even be aware that we are thinking; it seems like answers come to us from “out of the blue” and we are amazed at our own brilliance. Athletes refer to these times as “being in the zone”; when everything just seems to go right without a lot of effort.

Of course, we also experience times when we feel frustrated, confused, impatient or angry. We tend to see the worst in others. When we feel like this, we are experiencing lower-quality thinking. Our behavior at these times is usually less than effective—we often feel like our own worst enemy.
Have you ever tried to give feedback or coach someone when you were irritated or angry? How well did it go?

The moment-to-moment fluctuations in the quality of our thinking affect the way we feel, or our moods. The Mood Elevator is a tool we can use to notice when our thinking is “off,” or unreliable. When experiencing higher-quality thinking, we have feelings at the higher end of the elevator, such as gratitude, generosity, creativity, insight, appreciation, compassion and understanding. When we are experiencing lower-quality thinking, we have feelings like impatience, frustration, hostility, anxiety and judgment. Using our moods to gauge the quality of our thinking helps us to know when our thinking is reliable and when it is not, so we can make decisions with greater perspective and avoid being driven by lower-quality thoughts or thought habits.

Higher-quality thinking gives us greater “emotional intelligence.” If we can learn to identify the quality of our thinking, we will begin to make better choices, exhibit more effective behaviors more often, and avoid less-than-effective behaviors.

For example, one of the most useful levels in the Mood Elevator is “curious.” If someone does something we don’t understand, we often become irritated and judgmental. How much more effective could we be if we
directed our energy to being curious: "I wonder why they see it that way?" This type of shift can actually change the quality of our relationships and our lives.

Naturally, the fact that we are all human means we all ride up and down the Mood Elevator. We cannot always be at the top of our game, nor will we always be at the bottom. We may visit a level like “judgmental” or “frustrated,” but if we accept that this is all part of the human condition and surrender to the fact that sometimes we feel good and sometimes we don’t, we will eventually move back up the Mood Elevator. Unfortunately, you’ve probably met people who, without even being aware of it, seem to have permanently set up shop on these levels.

Being aware of these connections can help us avoid being “trapped” at the bottom of the Mood Elevator, and is the first step in being able to positively impact behavior and get better results. We will explore this concept further in chapter three, entitled “At Your Best.”

**what drives our behaviors and moods? the results cone**

Why do we behave the way we do? Where do our moods come from? We can answer this through a model we call the Results Cone. This model demonstrates the relationship between our thinking and our results.

![Results Cone Diagram](image)

The results we achieve are the outcome of our behaviors. So where does our behavior come from? What lies behind the tangible behavior is something not so tangible: our thinking or, more accurately, the thought
habits we’ve developed throughout our lives. In the session, the arm-wrestle game is an example of how many people have the thought habit, “For me to win, someone else has to lose.”

The third principle of the Human Operating System is:

3. Power of thought:

• Our thinking drives our behaviors.

• Our thoughts determine our moods and our moment-to-moment experience of life.

As human beings, we are constantly thinking. Most of the time, we are not aware of the exact nature of our thoughts or even that we are thinking! Yet our entire experience of life is determined by our moment-to-moment thinking and unique thought habits. Our thinking also drives our moods: Worried thinking creates worried feelings; hopeful thinking creates hopeful feelings. These thoughts, thought habits and feelings are continually driving our behavior and ultimately, our results. It works something like this:

**Thought Habit:** “In order for me to win, someone else has to lose.”

**Behaviors:** Unhealthy competition within a company or team; people are unwilling to share information or resources.

**Results:** Time and energy is wasted on defensive maneuvering, having to “re-invent the wheel” because information is not shared. Productivity decreases; costs increase.

If, however, my thinking is, “We’re all in this together,” then I am more likely to look for ways to win as a whole team, and will achieve better results both personally and for my organization.

**Thought Habit:** “If I can’t say something nice, then I shouldn’t say anything at all.”

**Behaviors:** People are reluctant to coach others or offer valuable developmental feedback.

**Results:** People unknowingly waste time and resources on less-than-effective pursuits. Productivity, profitability and teamwork suffer.
If, on the other hand, I believe that giving constructive feedback and appreciation is an important part of developing my team, I’ll do it easily and consistently, thereby improving the productivity of my team and ultimately the profitability of my organization.

Most people are not aware of the connection between their thinking and their results. Thought habits are an unconscious pattern, because our thinking is usually invisible to us. The first step in increasing our personal effectiveness is to become aware of some of our more pervasive thought habits and consider how they might drive our behavior—and ultimately our results. The Senn Delaney process gives you insights into your habits so you can make new choices. We call it “insight-based learning.”

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thought habits at work

Energy, moods, quality of thinking and culture are all very subjective yet powerful notions. Recognizing and spending time on these things has not always been acceptable in business. When Senn Delaney began its work with organizational culture in the 1970s, we were entering largely uncharted territory. Most business leaders at that time did not place much importance on dealing with the subjective side of business, and culture was not a word in the business vocabulary. In the early 80s, Tom Peters, then a consultant with McKinsey and Company, gathered data on the power of the subjective for the book *In Search of Excellence*, co-written with Robert Waterman.¹ Peters and Waterman determined that the subjective factors of business, such as style of management, interpersonal skills and shared values, or culture, were critical elements for organizational success. However, as a rule, people still tend to neglect these factors.

*In Search of Excellence* was based on a McKinsey and Company organization analysis model called “The 7-S Model.”
The model analyzed successful and unsuccessful organizations by looking at seven variables. There were three “hard” or objective S’s—strategy, structure and systems; and four “soft” or subjective S’s—skills, staff, style and shared values/culture. The authors identified key cultural qualities of the successful organizations as things like “bias for action” and “close to the customer.”

The research found that, of the organizations studied, the most successful were more skilled at working on both sets of S’s. The less-successful organizations tended to ignore, discount or neglect the “soft” side. Of all of the subjective S’s, shared values/culture turned out to be the most significant factor in success.

The Human Operating System helps to illustrate why we tend to neglect the powerful subjective side.

filters

The fourth and final principle of the Human Operating System is:

4. Blind spots and selective perception:
Life events, situations and people look different to each of us because we each have:

- Selective perception
- Blind spots
- Our own unique memory and filters

(Caution: Things are not as they appear)
Earlier in this chapter, we discussed how each of us experiences the world differently. Another way to describe this is that each of us sees the world through a unique set of filters. Our filters cause each one of us to see things differently from anyone else—they “color” our experience of life.

We all have filters that take different forms. The following list is not all-inclusive by any means, but typical filters that tend to operate for all of us include our:

- Past experiences
- Values
- Beliefs/thought habits
- State of mind or moods
- Behavioral style
- Gender/age
- Race/religion

These filters, combined with our moment-to-moment thought process, create what is called our selective perception.

**selective perception**

Since it is impossible to be aware of everything that is happening at any one time, we are “selectively” aware. What we focus on in any given situation is shaped by our filters and thought processes. In the session, when we looked at the collage with dozens of items, each person focused on a different set of objects. Another example of this is what happens when we start to shop for a new car. Suddenly we begin to see the same model everywhere we go! Of course, we realize that they have always been there, but we didn’t notice them before.

Once we selectively perceive any situation, we have a tendency to assume that what we see is the whole picture—we think that this is what others see, or should see, as well. That tendency is at the core of many conflicts we experience throughout our lives. It is further compounded because once we see things a given way, it becomes very difficult to see another point of view. We call this “lock-in/lock-out.” This phenomenon
can cause serious relationship issues and leadership disputes. We can at times become very inflexible when we believe that our perception is the “truth” and others are wrong, when in fact we just see things differently. To the extent that we can understand this, we can be more respectful of other points of view and our relationships and results will improve.

The image below can help illustrate how the phenomenon of selective perception works. What do you see?

![M.C. Escher's Circle Limit IV](https://example.com/circle-limit-iv.png)

**Figure 9.4 M.C. Escher’s “Circle Limit IV” © 2006 The M.C. Escher Company-Holland. All rights reserved.**

Most people initially see either bats (black) or angels (white). Which did you see first? If you saw the angels first, it probably took some effort to see the bats—or vice versa. We also have a tendency to do this in our lives.

Here’s an example:

During a department meeting, one manager remarked that he was ready to implement a change and was confident he had identified and dealt with all possible obstacles.

When a direct report attempted to offer several alternate ideas, the manager’s first reaction was “that would be a waste of time.” Upon further reflection, he decided to ask for more input from the direct report. To his surprise, he found that his direct report had seen a number of things he had missed that were ultimately critical to the success of the change.
The direct report had simply looked at it from a different point of view.

We must become aware that selective perception and the lock-in/lock-out phenomenon can cause people to react to things differently. When people don’t behave the same way we do, we all have a tendency to assume that it’s due to some defect in the other person’s personality. Relationships would be much smoother if we could understand that people aren’t “defective”; they just see the world as a slightly different place than we do.

How often have you been caught up in a discussion believing you are right, only to find out later that there was more to the story than you realized? Being aware of the concept of selective perception can make a real difference in results and relationships.

“I never realized they had feelings.”


blind spots

The key to better understanding and dealing with the subjective dimension of business is to help us become more aware of the blind spots each of us has, due in part to our intellectual “wiring.” Understanding how our brain functions can help us to become better leaders, teammates and performers.

Our brain is divided into two hemispheres:
The two hemispheres of our brain control completely different functions. As you’ll note in the graphic above, the left side controls our objective (tangible or "hard") side and the right side controls our subjective (intangible or "soft") side.

Neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D. was a scientist at Harvard when she had a profound firsthand experience of the disparate functions of the right and left cranial hemispheres: at the age of 37, she had a massive stroke when a blood vessel exploded in the left side of her brain. As this was occurring, she observed her left-brain functions completely shut down in the span of four hours. Yet, amazingly, her working right brain provided her with a total sense of well-being and even euphoria.

In her book, My Stroke of Insight, she describes how this experience helped her understand the differences in the brain hemispheres. "My right hemisphere is all about right here, right now," she says. "My right mind is all about the richness of this present moment. It is filled with gratitude for my life and everyone and everything in it. It is content, compassionate, nurturing, and eternally optimistic. To my right mind character, there is no judgment of good/bad or right/wrong, so everything exists on a continuum of relativity."

Alternatively, the left hemisphere "is one of the finest tools in the universe when it comes to organizing information. My left hemisphere personality takes pride in its ability to categorize, organize, describe, judge, and critically analyze absolutely everything," Taylor writes. "To keep up with life’s experiences in the external world, my left mind processes information remarkably fast—much faster than my right hemisphere."

Because of its speed and organizational ability, most of us have grown up learning to use our left brain much more often than our right—through elementary school learning the 3R’s, and through high school
learning algebra, science or a second language. For many of us, our first job required us to quickly learn a number of new skills and tasks, and so again, we focused on using our left brain.

As we move into management positions where relationships, influencing people and innovation are important, we can run into trouble. The problem is that our right brain, which helps us do things like lead and develop people, and to think creatively, is under-developed.

Fortunately, as Taylor learned throughout her eight-year recovery process, we have the ability to recalibrate our brain’s circuitry. She says of human brain cells: “Thanks to their neural plasticity, their ability to shift and change their connections with other cells, you and I walk the earth with the ability to be flexible in our thinking, adaptable to our environment, and capable of choosing who and how we want to be in this world. Fortunately, how we choose to be today is not predetermined by how we were yesterday.”

The world we live in is far too complex to think with only half a brain! To be at our best in this day and age, we need take Taylor’s advice and learn to use both sides of our brain well.

The F’s exercise from the session also makes this point very well. Here is another version of that exercise for you to try:

How many F’s do you see when you quickly look at the sentence below?

Finished files are the result of

years of scientific study combined

with the experience of years.

Do you think you got them all? After experiencing the exercise, you were more aware of your blind spots, so you probably did better this time. (See the answer on the next page.)
“That, at any rate, is the situation as my coolly analytical left brain sees it. Now let me communicate, if I can, my right brain’s gut reaction.”

Drawing by J. Handelsman; ©1986 Harvard Business Review.

Because we have spent so much time developing the left side of our brain, whenever we are put to a task, we tend to overuse the left brain and override the right. This can be useful when we have to analyze data, but it can also create serious blind spots, much as you saw in the above exercise where most people came up short in counting the F’s. The left side of our brain tends to discount the “of”s buried in the sentences, either because it sees them as inconsequential words, or because the linguistic (sound) function of the brain “sees” the word “of” as “ov.” (By the way, there were 6 F’s this time.)

So remember:

• Things are not always as they appear. Be willing to entertain the notion that you may not have the whole picture.

• When someone sees things differently, try to understand their point of view; they might know something you don’t.

• Get input from multiple sources so they can help point out possible “blind spots.”

summary

One of the premises of our process is that every person sees the world differently because the way we view things is determined by
our own thinking in any given moment. Getting better results and creating more success with less stress requires an understanding of the Human Operating System, or the subjective aspect of the human experience.

1. **Energy:** Managing personal energy is a key to healthy, high performance.

2. **Moods:** Our state of mind (moods) determines:
   - Our effectiveness.
   - Our quality of life.

3. **Power of thought:**
   - Our thinking drives our behaviors.
   - Our thoughts determine our moods and our moment-to-moment experience of life.

4. **Blind spots and selective perception:** Life events, situations and people look different to each of us because we each have:
   - Selective perception
   - Blind spots
   - Our own unique memory and filters

**questions, action steps and assignments**

1. Reflect on several projects you are working on. Where might some of your
blind spots be? How might you be able to use the wisdom of your team to help ensure you see the whole picture?

2. Reflect on the last several weeks. When were you in a high-quality thinking state? When were you in a low-quality thinking state? What were your familiar feelings like in each instance?

**High:**

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

**Low:**

__________________________________________________________________________
3. Can you see a connection between your moods and your effectiveness? Describe that connection in your own words.