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Neuroscientist reveals how nonconformists achieve success

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In a new book, *Iconoclast: A Neuroscientist Reveals How to Think Differently* (Harvard Business Press, 2008), Gregory Berns, MD, PhD, shows us how the world's most successful innovators think and what we can learn from them.

Berns is distinguished chair of neuroeconomics, professor of economics at Emory University, and professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, Emory University School of Medicine. He focuses his research on human motivation and decision-making through a blend of neuroscience, economics and psychology.

"Iconoclasts are individuals who do things that others say can't be done," explains Berns. "An iconoclast defies the rules, but given the opportunity, can be an asset to any organization because of the skill to be creative and innovative despite adversity."

The book examines the stories of famous and not-so-famous iconoclasts to learn something about creative decision-making, innovation and creativity and the ability to control fear, and to look at the neuroscience behind those processes. Berns profiles people such as Walt Disney, the iconoclast of animation; Natalie Maines, an accidental iconoclast; and Martin Luther King, who conquered fear.

Berns says that many successful iconoclasts are made not born. For various reasons, they simply see things differently than other people do.

"Certainly there are people who are born this way, but what I have been able to learn about these individuals is that most successful iconoclasts are people who are skilled at handling failure and particularly at handling fear - fear of failure, fear of the unknown," says Berns.

He also discovered a trait that ultimately distinguishes the people who are really successful is social intelligence.

"A person can have the greatest idea in the world - completely different and novel - but if that person can't convince enough other people, it doesn't matter," says Berns.

Source: Emory University

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