

# Rock On!

A new field of study – Neuroleadership – plumbs the depths of leaders' minds. Its founder, **David Rock**, explains why the tough get going when the going gets tough

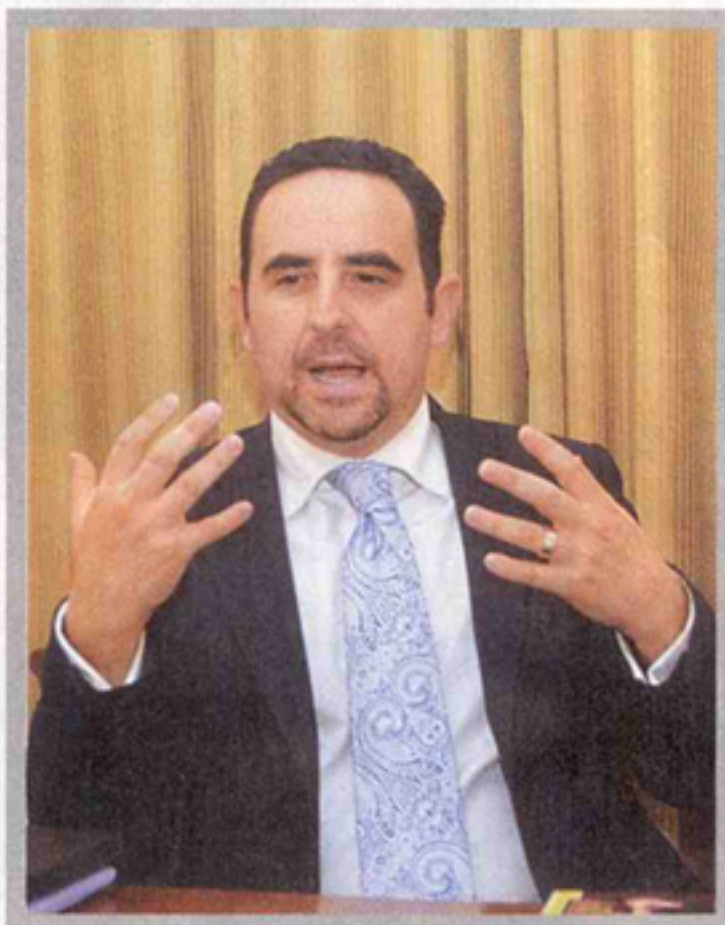
Moinak Mitra

**AS IT GLOBALISES**, there's a discernible buzz in Asian Paints about creating managers from within its hierarchy. "A coaching culture needs to be developed and we need more coaches who can in turn train others in the company," remarks Vivek Patwardhan, VP-HR at Asian Paints. Not long after the company realised this, an unsuspecting Sydneysider came to its rescue- the 41-year-old David Rock, an Aussie without the accent, who runs Results Coaching Systems (RCS) and has spawned a whole new field of study called 'Neuroleadership'. As Rock busies himself building a coaching culture across the organisation, he is also bracing up for leadership camps in HSBC, Tata Sky, IBM and a swathe of Indian companies.

Rock is known internationally as the founder of the cerebral approach to coaching, which has gathered momentum as a theory base for coaching since 2004. In collaboration with several leading neuroscientists, he is working to explain the neural basis of issues like self-awareness, reflection, insight and accountability.

In India as part of RCS South Asia's coaching interventions provided by FranklinCovey- the Utah-based training and consulting firm, Rock is particularly in demand as a slow-down looms large. "In a recession, uncertainty is the main issue that decreases our capacity to think," he points out, adding that uncertainty needs to be balanced out with rewards.

True, in a workplace, rewards most prominently manifest themselves in the form of money and resources. But given the current scenario, Rock calls upon managements to wrap a SCARF - an acronym for Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness - around their people. "While people are traditionally rewarded with money and resources, the other rewards are more long term." From uncertainty, which is an "avoid"



**GURU  
SPEAK**

state, if rewarded by following Rock's SCARF, people can be woken up to the "approach" state.

The management guru recalls how when he was recently in Singapore he observed the chief of a company taking a massive pay-cut following the financial crisis. He clearly led by example and others in his company followed suit. Rock calls that fairness in the workplace.

Neuroleadership, admits Rock, is no hard science and has only really taken off in the last three years. It clearly comprises four key areas of interest in leadership - decision-making and problem-solving, regulating emotion, collaborating with others, and facilitating change - which Rock links to effect with coaching and neuroscience.

This separate field of study really took off in 2006 after Rock authored *Quiet Leadership*. "I saw a very strong tendency among leaders to be authoritarian, and while it's good for people doing

physical work, it may have serious side-effects otherwise," he notes, adding that he discovered a far more effective way of improving performance. "Leaders should hold on to their ideas and help others seed theirs, as they otherwise would generate a threat to the status and autonomy of their co-workers," he says.

In brief, that has enabled Rock to break through to the other side of impasse- to generate insights. Today, Rock helps companies by enhancing the insights of their management. "I can enhance insights by 50 times," he claims, elaborating that good ideas can only come through in an "approach" state of mind rather than an "avoid" state.

Positive vibes apart, leaders must have a "braking system". Rock feels that a true leader must not easily get upset or display emotions and that's when his braking system should be applied to inhibit the wrong processes. Say, in the ongoing recession, a straight

firing seems to be the obvious medicine to bring down the wage bill. But Rock recommends more soothing but sure-shot remedies, like reducing salaries of top execs, or initiating part-time jobs, which, he opines, connect with the workforce better.

In his *Quiet Leadership*, Rock dwelt considerably on reconstructing what he calls the 'aha' moment. "It is a moment when the brain changes, as it reconfigures the mind releasing a lot of adrenaline (alertness) and dopamine (interest)," he points out. Understandably, the more anxious the mind, the less the likelihood of experiencing the 'aha' moment. "Typically, it requires a quiet moment, say two seconds in a day, for a quiet mind to get activated for one to dramatically increase the number of insights," he says. A leader, he observes, must follow these "subtle signals" to draw up his vision.

P 2: WRAP THE SCARF

