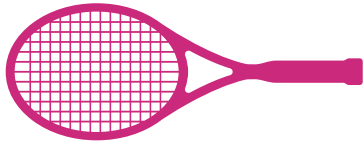


# LOVE-SPORT

## Insights



... these pearls of wisdom were written in 2015. After many promises to reveal here it is.

## You can't teach an old dog new tricks..... Why?

Sadly there is some truth to this coined phrase but possibly not for the reasons you might have thought. Rather than dwell on what may not be possible later in life, let's focus on why the young are so easy to teach.... or is it easier to learn when you are younger?

## Let me introduce you to the Prefrontal cortex.

There is nothing simple when it comes to understanding the brain but in the most simplistic context the prefrontal cortex makes up part of the frontal lobe to your brain. It is considered to be the conductor of thoughts and actions in accordance with internal goals. It is responsible for deciding the dilemma of turning left or right, staying or going, moderating your social behaviour, problem solving, memory and considering future consequences.



My son Jensen is often my teacher because he surprises me and provides behaviour that intrigues me and makes me want to understand what makes him and others tick. One such instance was when he was learning to ride a bike. This is a big dad day in the world of physical milestones so we seriously get geared up for the impending frustrations, fits of anger and dad being a rubbish teacher. Knowing this was just a game of perseverance keeping his spirits up for the next attempt was the critical behaviour. I knew failing over and over was bound to happen, packets of Elastoplast were going to be needed to cover all manner of bumps grazes, cuts and bruises.

I had already made a judgement (or my prefrontal cortex had) of what we were about to enter. This was based on my previous experience seeing others and hearing the stories of similar events that there would be crashes and we were in for a rocky ride. Did I let Jensen in on this secret....? No chance!

Now, something I hadn't considered was what prejudgements Jensen made about the process of learning to ride a bike. He hadn't tried before, he knew some of his friends had achieved the same milestone already. What was he expecting in this process and did it run parallel to my own expectations?

Usual behaviour for children, Jensen acts and then deals with the consequences later, children can be un-empathic and we should empathise with that. Empathy goes hand in hand with the past

experience and being able to relate to a situation having been there before. Children have experienced less than we have. Patience and self exploration over time builds empathy and a database for the frontal cortex to refer to. No data, no experience, nothing to base a decision or consider a consequence.

So the day comes and the stabilisers are off, dad is prepared for tears and blood, Jensen seemingly not bothered about it all. Jensen mounts up, I'm behind steadying the operation with one hand on the saddle like we do and..... he just rides, rides and rides. No assistance, no tears, no blood and the stock of plasters stay in the first aid kit. After all the escalation of the event it was totally uneventful, except for the fact he could now ride a bike!

Is Jensen gifted with some athletic prowess...? I don't think so, or a Chris Froome in the making? I doubt it he doesn't like riding that much! The gift he had was he went in with no previous experience, pre judgements or horror stories of bike riding. His frontal cortex was a blank canvass ready archive the experience of riding a bike.



Maybe this is the very definition of beginners luck is, he did not fear the process as he could see any consequence of removing the stabilisers, only I could. Boris Becker winning Wimbledon at the tender age of 17 is great example of where inexperience was used as a good thing. In some ways I would have preferred some struggle to learn as now I sense Jensen has a deficit in foresight of what could happen on a bike and doesn't see the potential dangers.

Old dogs do struggle with new tricks because of the residual data stored in the frontal cortex from past experiences. The memories that say we do something a certain way deflect change and we continue the path we were already on. It is a privilege for teachers to influence the data base of learning skill and I've learnt we should approach more situations without trying to explain what we think will happen.

So, lets say you are an old dog and fancy some new tricks, like..... riding a uni-cycle, imagine that, learning to ride a one wheeled bicycle. I'd be staggered if anybody reading this didn't immediately link how hard it would be and how you would probably fall off. Your frontal cortex has just begun considering the consequences of your future actions and is now making the decision of whether you should proceed. Basically its going to talk you out of it or at least trying it properly because of fear. The same can be said for tennis, new instructions cause change, loss of control and uncertainty of the outcome, not useful when you want to get the ball in so badly, so its best not to engage in the changes right? Initially the changes are likely to make you miss, the frontal cortex knows this and tries to talk you out of entering a situation where you believe you will fail, that discussion is a whole new topic and one you can learn more through reading about the learning process. Failing used to forge a pathway to success when we were children, now these old dogs just don't like failing and see things the way they are. Children see creative solutions far better than adults allowing them to explore situations further than an adult would, hence many of my

own lessons have adults doing some silly practices, kids don't see them as silly its just a practice. Adults must be opened minded enough to try some silly stuff and allow the inner child to teach them. Kids are in fact teaching us in lots of ways going against what our frontal cortex knows and what the social perception is that adults teach children.....

**“The world would simply not progress if old tricks were taught to new dogs. Coaches, teachers, players and performers that buck the trend and try something different receive the newest and richest information” ....** now, where can I get that unicycle?