



BSR Conference 2010
Innovate. Integrate. Inspire.

Playing for Happiness and Success

Breakout Session Summary
Friday, November 5, 2010 | 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Speakers

- » **Stuart L. Brown**, Founder, The National Institute for Play
- » **Daniel Hsu**, Manager, Operations and Advisory Services, BSR (moderator)

Highlights

- » Play is important in increasing cognitive skills.
- » Play has been considered trivial and secondary, but it's important for improving our ability to innovate.
- » Curiosity and imagination are an important part of play behavior.

Memorable Quotes

"Human beings are designed to play, and much of who we are is designed by play."—Stuart Brown, The National Institute for Play

Overview

Brown started the highly visual presentation by stressing that play is important for innovation. The concept of play, he said, is integrated into the human brain, and inspiration is what we get after a good bout of play. Incorporating play into your life will improve it, personally and professionally, Brown said.

He went on to discuss how animals incorporate play in nature, and how polar bears and dogs have similar signal systems to engage in play. Brown said that play alters your state of being, and described how the human brain behaves as a result of active play.

By comparing pictures of a human lung to a leaf, Brown revealed similar patterns in nature's design. In this context, he wanted to demonstrate how patterns exist throughout nature, including patterns of play.

Brown also discussed how play begins with a parent and child, which creates the grounding for play behavior. He analyzed the brain activity of a child and mother when playing and discovered that they show similar brain activity. He went on to say that play can help manage stress and emotions.

Brown said that the principle of "use it or lose it" applies to play. For example, koalas originally had large brains, but then stopped using them due to a lack of environmental stimulation; now the marsupials have smaller brains.

Playing with objects is important. Brown described how kids who use their hands to play with objects become better problem solvers. Rough-and-tumble play teaches an individual to understand signals of play; those who don't learn these signals at a young age tend to exhibit bullying behavior. Brown referenced studies that have found murderers kill in part because they never learned the signals of play in childhood.



In the Q&A portion of the session, a participant asked how the Institute takes the concept of play to organizations. Brown cited an example in which a client had meeting participants wear coveralls and write the meeting notes on them. The goal was to make meetings less boring by integrating the concept of play.

Another participant asked how the concept of play can be used for employee engagement. Brown responded that it is important to integrate it as a common practice within the company and not to isolate it as a separate initiative.

When a participant questioned how play should be integrated into the education system, Brown said it was important for schools to keep physical activity as part of the curriculum because play helps improve cognitive ability.

What if others feel that a child's play is inappropriate or outside of social norms? An example was given about a 5-year-old boy who dressed for his school's Halloween activities as a female character from Scooby-Doo. Brown said it is important for parents to supervise play, but let children learn from it even if others might deem an activity or response as improper. This is important for development because play has a self-correcting process that helps children learn and adapt their social skills.

Notes Sponsor

VOLKSWAGEN
GROUP OF AMERICA