In the early 90s, I met my wife on a flight to New York. We had both been given scholarships to study in the same university in the United States. I started talking to her and asked her what she planned to study. I had no clue what I wanted to do but she immediately responded: “I want to be a graphic designer.”

A week later, I met another Malaysian who was a graphic designer who decided to come to the United States to study design and get a degree. Prior to meeting them, I had no idea that the graphic design occupation even existed. In fact, 20 years ago, most parents would have dreaded having their children study graphic design. However, with universities today such as Limkokwing, The One Academy, Saito, UTAR and virtually all having design programmes, it is now commonplace to see many students explore careers in graphic design. And a career in graphic design is one of the most exciting career paths out there.

A career as a graphic designer can take many different flavours as graphic design touches so many areas of visual output. They work with letters, colour, patterns, photography, illustration, information and physical materials to create everything from annual reports to logos; maps and diagrams to albums and book covers; product packaging to digital interfaces and many more.

A few weeks ago, I met Stefan Sagmeister, who is considered one of the greatest graphic designers in the world. He came to the Leaderonomics offices to share some of his insights on graphic design. Our feature story on page 8-9 covers these insights. Interestingly, Sagmeister realised at the age of 15 that his passion in life was design. He dedicated his whole life to being the best designer in the world and has won a number of Grammy awards for his album cover designs. Finding out what energises you and what you love early in your life helps you focus on practising your craft and enables you to become the best. Sagmeister was fortunate to discover his calling so early in life. Some of us may have yet to uncover our passion in life. Finding out and doing what you love is key to having a great career and ensuring that you become successful.

In this issue, we uncover the world of graphic design and art. We look at what a typical day in the life of a graphic designer is like. Tung Eng Hwa, the manager of editorial art and design at The Star tells us his story. If you prefer to watch a video of him in action, go to Leaderonomics TV and watch him as he showcases his typical day. We also spend some time with Izmer Ahmad, a professor of art theory, on what it means to be learning about art and his life. Of course, we will have the usual great articles which give everyone career advice and insights on developing yourself and your leadership potential.

I do hope you will gain some insightful lessons from this special myStarjob.com issue on the world of graphic design. As always, you can download our amazing Top 10 and other videos from www.leaderonomics.tv and we wish you all the best in your career journey! At Leaderonomics, we love to hear your feedback and comments on how our career guide can improve and how we can help you become a better leader and have a more stellar career. So, do send us an email at mystarjob@leaderonomics.com to share your thoughts on how we have been doing these past two months. Have a great career!

Warm regards,
Roshan Thiran
Editor, myStarjob.com & CEO, Leaderonomics
A Day in the Life of a Graphic Designer

By DEBBIE POZZOBON
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I AM always enthralled when I come across people who have a talent or gift that I don’t have. This normally happens in the creative field where we look with respect and undoubtedly a certain amount of healthy envy at the world of musicians and artists. I was reminded of this during my interview with Tung Eng Hwa who is the manager, editorial art and design for The Star.

He shared with us how he came to be in this position, as well as what a typical day in his professional life comprises. Tung fell in love with drawing and painting in watercolours at an early age. During secondary school, a visiting lecturer did a presentation on graphic design that captured his imagination. He saw a creative outlet for his art. Whilst still attending school, he completed this course. That was over 20 years ago! He initially worked at a brass souvenir shop where he learned to create souvenirs pieces using a chemical-etching technique, and later worked as a graphic designer at a production house. He joined The Star 16 years ago as a graphic artist, and progressed to the management position.

His working day usually commences at 2pm in the afternoon. This may sound fantastic. However, he only leaves work after 10pm at night, and if there are issues to resolve – sometimes later. “On occasion we receive text messages and mails at 1am before the final edition of the paper is printed – so sometimes ours is not a simple eight-hour day,” he says.

His first activity actually takes place on the way in to the office, when he passes a newsstand. He likes to look at the piles of newspapers for sale, and compare which pile looks smaller. “It gives me a sense of gratification to see that people are buying our paper,” he says smiling.

Upon arrival at the office, his first port of call is to check his emails. Issues that may relate to any one of the number of sections of the paper to which he and his team provides graphics, layout or creative services, may require his urgent feedback. He currently has three teams that report to him: creative layout, graphics and illustrations and the iPad driven “The Star Editor’s Choice” edition. He may be asked to provide assistance with layout, pictures, ideas, or illustrations – or his favourite – infographic. An example of an infographic is the visual on the front cover of the budget edition. It is a graphic – or picture that also contains text and information that is descriptive and explanatory. Some of the mails may be to do with the issue that is going to print that day, whilst others may embrace forward planning for issues taking place in the future.

Whilst doing this, various people pop their heads over his screen, or rush into his office to ask for his input or suggestions on a range of creative issues. The pace and pressure of the work is high, and energy levels need to match these demands. One of Tung’s challenges is that he often has to come up with a creative concept on the spot. This is not always very easy! As if that were not enough, he then still has to explain his sketch or translate his idea into a framework that is understood by his audience. “My advice to young people that want to enter this profession is that they must be able to actually draw. When I seeraw, I mean sketch with a pencil, and not with a mouse. Over and above this, they must be able to communicate well to present, explain, or even sell their ideas.”

It is now time for Tung to get into the field and see how his team is faring. He checks on the progress of his designers and illustrators to see if everyone is on track, and whether he can be of any assistance. New work is also assigned to team members at this juncture of the day. It is common to see him and a designer huddled over a computer debating how to layout a page, or make an illustration or graphic look more appealing to the readers. Tung encourages his team members to look at the pace that they are providing creative input for, with the eyes of a reader who does not know anything about the background of the story. “How do you do get the reader’s attention?” is a question he asks his team regularly. “We need to use the content and the visuals to stimulate an emotion in the reader. What is that emotion – and how can we best get that response?”

One of the most critical issues that he always stresses to the team is integrity. Tung is mindful of the fact that The Star is a family paper, and that its content and visuals need to be sensitive to its audience. As a result, he and his team exercise prudence in the selection of the visuals. Equally important is the acknowledgement of the source of material. They ensure that any research goes beyond the Wikipedia and that in all cases people are accredited with their contributions or work.

It is time for the day’s editorial meeting. During this meeting, the contents of the paper are discussed to make sure that everything is on track. Any issues arising from this meeting have to be resolved immediately. Often designers and illustrators scramble to solve various crises. It may be decided that a fresh article needs priority over one that is already in place due to the currency of the content, and as such, his team may be called upon to assist with layout, illustration, or infographics in a hurry!

At 7.30pm it’s dinner time for Tung. He eats and continues to manage mails and situation from his desk as deadlines for segments come almost every hour on the hour. This is how the rest of his day is spent until the cut-off time for the paper going to print that night.

His team members are encouraged to give of their best the first time around, as Tung does not believe in “mock-ups.” The illustration or graphic must be his team’s best attempt the first time around. “I love it when I see the final graphic or illustration emerge. It is truly a satisfying and rewarding experience,” he says. He subscribes to these high standards both for himself and his team, and encourages and supports creative ingenuity. “There is, however, a fine line between fancy and messy,” he says with a smile and twinkle in the eye.

Although he admits to missing painting and drawing sometimes as his job now consists more of a managerial component – he still loves what he does. “It is a great feeling when you get a call from your boss commending the team on a job well done. It makes all the pressure worth it. It makes me come back and do it all again the next day.”
You will be put to the test in a simulated setting to manage a dynamic company. A variety of business and leadership exercises, including rigorous coaching will be provided throughout the programme. Highly experienced consultants will lead intensive group discussions that will push you to break idle barriers. Emphasis will also be placed on the creation of winning and innovative teams that are proficient at executing strategy in order to deliver effective business results. This and so much more because you deserve to be at the forefront of your industry.

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- Innovative and critical thinking that allow practical forecasting and risk mitigation
- A stronger, unified team sharing the same goal and mission
- Understanding of personal strengths and a focus on potential areas of improvement
- Committed plan for personal leadership development

THE EXPERTS:
With over 50 years of experience combined, our consultants know exactly what it takes to get you to the next level.

Carlo Peratoner has over 15 years of experience in finance, sales and marketing, engineering, management, and information technology and is co-owner and partner of TRI Corporation. He was also Founder and Owner of Client Relationship Systems, Inc.

Gerry Mattia is a consultant with TRI Corporation and Founder of Mattia & Associates, Inc. She is a member of GE’s Global Leadership Training Center in NY and specializes in Leadership & Team Development and creative Management training.

Roshan Thiran is CEO of Leaderonomics. He was previously Director of Global Talent Management with Johnson & Johnson and was also with GE for more than 12 years. Roshan has won numerous awards, including a crystal HR award and the Malaysia HR Leader Award.

Eric Lau is the Executive Director of Leaderonomics. He has extensive experience in leadership development and brand building in multi-national companies such as Pepsi and Unilever. He was previously part of the training faculty at Dale Carnegie Training.
Leaders Make People Mistakes

By George Kohlrieser
mystarjob@leaderonomics.com

UCH of today’s leadership writing focuses on what high performance leaders should do. Certainly, that material helps from a theoretical and aspirational point of view. However, what haunts leaders on a day-to-day basis are the mistakes that they make. They don’t trip up because they are bad people; they most often stumble because of a lack of knowledge, bad habits or too much stress.

The most common—and, not coincidentally, most damaging—mistakes involve interacting with people in the wrong way. Here are 10 such people mistakes that I see in the field, and I’m sure you witness them too:

1. **Not Taking Time to Bond with People**
   - A leader who is not interested in people on a human level is off to a bad start. A leader, who is conceptually interested in others but doesn’t make time to “bond” with people, misses the mark as well, whether those people are employees, colleagues, customers, or other stake-holders. Bonding is a deep emotional connection that is different from simply liking someone. In fact, you do not have to like people to bond with them. You do have to get to know them and understand what makes them tick. And that takes time above and beyond pure task-oriented work.

2. **Being Unavailable and Inaccessible**
   - Clearly, leaders need to delegate tasks. Yet delegation should not mean emotional detachment. Leaders who assign tasks and walk away with a completely hands-off approach abandon their people. Good delegation relies on continued connection and accessibility. You can maintain a sense of connection by signalling that you are willing to be available, but it doesn’t mean that you’re immediately responsive to every small request. It does mean that you’ve created channels for people to reach you as well as guidelines for using those channels.

3. **Not Focusing on Developing Talent**
   - Too often, leaders focus exclusively on driving the achievement of company goals. In their efforts to do this, they deny the inherent human need to learn. People want to expand their skills and competencies while doing their work. Understand that learning is an integral part of achieving results. When you prioritise learning, you become a great leader who can spot and develop talent in people who might themselves be unaware of it. You become, quite simply, a talent hunter.

4. **Not Giving Regular Feedback about Performance**
   - People achieve high performance only if they know the truth about their effectiveness. Too often, leaders ignore this need and thereby rob people of the key to their future. While tough feedback can be painful, great leaders know how to deliver this pain in a way that transforms it to such an extent that they say, “Thank you—give me more!” Talented people—who want to learn—would rather be “slapped in the face with the truth than kissed on the cheek with a lie.” Develop your ability to convey hard truths about performance and unlock the door to higher performance.

5. **Not Taking Emotions into Account**
   - The strongest emotions are related to loss, disappointment, failure and separation. In fact, research clearly shows that loss and even the fear of anticipated loss drive people’s behaviour much more strongly than potential benefits and rewards. Leaders who ignore the emotions of loss and disappointment make a major mistake that greatly reduces employee engagement. You can make a huge difference simply by being aware of these emotions and showing true interest in that part of a person’s experience.

6. **Managing Conflict Ineffectively**
   - Conflicts that are not addressed block cooperation and alignment around common goals. Tension, negative emotions, and polarisation build up. Conflicts become “fishes under the table”: even though everyone acts like they are not there, their abiding “smell” permeates the whole atmosphere. It’s up to you as a leader to put these fishes on the table and “clean them” by solving the underlying conflict. Your reward: a great fish dinner at the end of the day—an environment that provides nourishing enjoyment and can build even better and stronger teams.

7. **Not Driving Change**
   - Without change, our organisations, like all organisms, wither and ultimately die. Leaders who don’t drive change put their companies in grave danger. Explain the benefits that changes will bring, and do so knowing that people do not naturally resist change: they resist the fear of the unknown or the pain that might come with the transition. Your job is to provide a “secure base” that gives a sense of safety as well as the encouragement and energy to explore. In other words, you must care enough to encourage daring. This combination is crucial, and it’s why my new book about unleashing astonishing potential is called Care to Dare.

8. **Not Encouraging Others to Take Risks**
   - The human brain is, by default, defensive and risk-averse. Yet with intention, practice and, most importantly, positive role models, people can shift their mind to embrace risks. Too many leaders encourage people to stay in the safety zone, or, as I like to say, “Play not to lose.” But the best leaders create enough trust so that others feel safe and supported to take risks and “play to win.” This is an active, positive way of behaving that fuels change and ultimately achievement.

9. **Misunderstanding Motivation**
   - Most people are driven by “intrinsic motivators” like being challenged, learning something new, making an important difference or developing their talents. Too many leaders miss the opportunity to capitalise on this internal guidance system and instead focus on “extrinsic motivators” like bonuses, promotions, money and artificial rewards. Sure, you need to pay people fairly. Keep in mind, however, that such external carrots and sticks distort the internal motivation system. You will be a better leader when you focus on inspiring people and tap into what they truly desire to achieve in terms of growth and contribution.

10. **Managing Activities Rather Than Leading People**
    - People hate it when they are treated like cogs in a machine. Management is, though, so much about controlling, administering and planning activities, and, by extension, people. Leadership, on the other hand, involves inspiring, encouraging and bringing out the very best in people by building a sense of trust and by challenging them to take positive risks. To be a leader and not just a manager, you need to focus, therefore, on people as people. That takes time and attention, and takes us back to the basic of bonding—the antithesis to People Mistake number 1.

George Kohlrieser is a Professor of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour at IMD, a former hostage negotiator, and an award-winning author. He loves spending time in Malaysia and looks forward to helping more organisations in Malaysia develop high performance leaders. To contact George for his special leadership programmes, email people@leaderonomics.com

Ways to Avoid Common Leadership Pitfalls

[Image: myStarjob.com, Saturday 27 October 2012]
**Top 10 Ways to Make Your Workplace More Creative**

1. **Reward Creativity**
   The best way to encourage creativity is by rewarding it. Provide financial or non-financial rewards, like recognition or other incentives.

2. **Provide Creative Outlets**
   Providing freedom for creative expression in the workplace is crucial. For instance, let employees decorate their personal work area as creatively as they wish. Develop channels for employees to voice their ideas by using a suggestion box or something similar. This will encourage employees to share freely their ideas and thoughts.

3. **Make it Known**
   Make it clear to employees that creativity and innovation are valued and embraced by the company. This will heighten awareness and encourage intentionality to cultivate creative initiatives in the workplace and among the employees.

4. **Designate Creative Spaces**
   This can be a physical area or a designated time during the work week where employees can gather to brainstorm, think, and explore creative ideas and solutions.

5. **Allow for Play Time**
   Playtime, outings and fun activities bring the mind into a relaxed phase that is conducive to idea generation. Research has shown that positive moods can spur creativity. It is important to cultivate a fun and positive working environment that supports the flow of creative juices.

6. **Lead by Example**
   Leaders have to demonstrate their openness and receptiveness towards creativity in the workplace. By their example, the culture of creativity will then be embraced and carried out throughout the organisation.

7. **Build a Diverse Team**
   If at all possible, build a team with diverse backgrounds, talents, personalities, and cultures. The cross-pollination effect of diversity within the group may spur a wealth of new ideas.

8. **Learn or Try Something New Daily**
   Learning new things or acquiring new skills can inspire and increase our capacity to be more creative. Organising learning sessions on issues outside of the normal field or industry can be fruitful for the imagination.

9. **Set up a Creative Think-tank**
   A more systematic way of promoting creativity in the workplace is to set up innovation teams. Each innovation team can be tasked to come up with ideas, such as on how to improve a particular aspect of work processes.

10. **Create a Criticism-Free Environment**
    Criticism or cynical attitudes kill creativity. Responses like “This is impossible!” or “This has never been done before!” and other similar comments emanate from closed minds. Resistance can destroy ideas and stifle creative culture, and should be avoided.
STEVEN SAGMEISTER: THE JOURNEY SO FAR

By JESSICA ONG
jessica.ong@leaderonomics.com

SAGMEISTER is considered a legend by many in the graphic design world. His work is raw, real, and personifies the word “cutting-edge.” It takes a good designer to produce attractive work, but a true avant-garde to make you experience sensations you’re not completely sure you should be feeling. He espouses the belief that all work should be genuine. The realist in him, however, understands that while it may be “difficult to make great long-term choices and impossible to always stay on the right side of things, one can still try.”

The award-winning designer received his first Grammy in 2005 for art directing the “Once in a Lifetime” box set, by Talking Heads. He then went on to bag another in 2010 for his design of the David Byrne and Brian Eno album — “Everything That Happens Will Happen Today” — in the Best Recording Package category.

As evidenced by his Grammy awards, Sagmeister’s design journey was one, very much influenced by his experiences as a kid. He记得 about being in a rock band when he was 14 years old and becoming interested in album covers. About a year later, he began writing for a small magazine in a neighbouring town. However, not long after this he found himself managing the graphic layout instead. This transition happened quite organically as the magazine was involved in music and constantly needed graphics for the music festivals it organised.

Sagmeister admits to having some- what of an edge as he discovered his passion early in life. He failed to gain admittance the first time he applied to the highly competitive University of Applied Arts, Vienna. There were about 300 applicants for 10 places and candidates had to slog through a three-day examination. Undeterred, Sagmeister attended a private school for a year before re-applying and being accepted into the school he had long set his sights on. Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, Vivienne Westwood, Karl Lagerfeld and Jil Sander are just a few of the many renowned artists and designers associated with this university. According to Sagmeister, this also happens to be the same institution that refused to accept Hitler as a student.

While studying in Vienna, Sagmeister was commissioned to design posters for a modern theatre. The posters had great visibility as they were posted on columns all over town. At the end of his studies, the young designer saw an advert about an application for a Fulbright Scholarship and applied for it. Lady Luck must have been smiling down on Sagmeister. As it so happened, the Fulbright Commissioners were all big fans of his work and had seen his work, Sagmeister poignantly recalls winning a bet against his brother-in-law at the age of 18 and securing four-paid tickets to New York. Upon his arrival at the Big Apple, Sagmeister knew from the start that this was where he wanted to be. The Fulbright Scholarship allowed him to live out this particular dream by financing his studies at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York.

The scholarship was a blessing in more ways than one as it enabled Sagmeister to select design jobs based purely on merit. By the time he graduated from the Pratt Institute, he had an extensive portfolio, which meant that he never really had to work as a junior designer. After three years in New York, he returned to Austria for compulsory military service, that he managed to substitute with compulsory community work. Sagmeister spent two years in Hong Kong working for the Leo-Burnett Agency. He gained instant recognition in 1992 with his winning poster for the annual 4As (The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies Hong Kong) competition. At that point, Sagmeister did not realise the stir he would cause by depicting a traditional image featuring four bare male bottoms. There was quite some controversy around the poster and he recalls getting booted and hissed at during the 4As award ceremony. The daring designer, however, would not have had it any other way and stuck to his beliefs that “having guts always works out for me.”

Sagmeister soon grew tired of Hong Kong and returned to the United States where he set about pursuing work with M&Co, the acclaimed late Tibor Kalman’s graphics studio. Kalman had always been one of his heroes and Sagmeister was determined to land a job there. He was relentless and hounded Kalman with calls until he finally persuaded the design guru to take him under his wing. Six months later, Sagmeister opened his own studio when his mentor decided to close shop and move to Rome to work as a full-time editor for Benetton. Sagmeister Inc was born, and its arrival was announced with yet another one of his provocative pieces, a card featuring his own nude figure. Work was depressingy scarce at first and none of the record labels he approached seemed interested. Sagmeister’s fortunes changed dra- matically, however, when he snagged the opportunity to design a CD cover for a friend’s album, H.P. Zinker’s Mountains of Madness. The complete CD packaging includes a red-tinted transparent case showing a close-up of a calm man’s face. By using the principles of complementary colours, Sagmeister designed it in such a way that when the album is removed from the case, the facial expression of the man dramatically changes to one of frenzy in shades of red, white and green. Mountains of Madness won Sagmeister the first of his Grammy nominations. This sent a clear message to the world that Sagmeister could indeed deliver. From that point on, a steady number of job offers started streaming in. The rest, as they say, is history and Sagmeister has never looked back!

Sagmeister Inc has recently become Sagmeister & Walsh as a result of a new partnership between Stefan Sagmeister and Jessica Walsh.

How many of you have noticed that under- standing something does not guarantee that you will be able to recall it? Have you noticed that your mind has a mind of its own? Ever gues- ted learning short cut on the planet!!

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By TERRY SMALL
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How many of you have noticed that under- understanding something does not guarantee that you will be able to recall it? Have you noticed that your mind has a mind of its own? Ever get- to the bottom of a page and wonder what you just read? Forget someone’s name a few seconds after you heard it? How about telephone numbers? Study material? The list goes on and on.

In order to remember something you must pay attention! You brain is bombarded with information every day. Far too much informa- tion! To survive, most of us have become good at not paying attention. Samuel Johnson said: “The art of memory is the art of paying atten- tion.” Here is a technique that will change your life in seconds. When you hear or study some- thing important and you have understood it, do not let your brain move on too quickly. Pause and ask yourself: “How am I going to remember this?” Then watch your genius brain go to work. There are dozens of tech- niques to anchor information in your brain. In the next Brain Bulletin I will tell you about my favourite. Multi-tracking! The greatest- est learning short cut on the planet!!

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SAGMEISTER’S TIPS FOR THE
STUDENT DESIGNER

By EMELIA ONG IAN LI

GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

As a designer, Sagmeister has dabbled in many mediums, so far detached from the realm of graphic design. You can imagine Sagmeister working with psychotherapy, dance and film. No wonder his students always say he is having fun. These ideas apply not only to the work of designers, but also to everyday life.

Whatever you find yourself doing, whether sitting in your yoga class, spending time with the family, or looking at a digital image, use it! The diversity of our experience helps us to think about the things we do in a different way. Sagmeister reminds us that while the process of design involves being in touch with the tactile and sensual qualities of materials being touched, all doesn’t have a function. “And therefore the more things you come out of,” he says, “the more things you can think of.”

Think about how we make our jobs become our calling again. If you look at designing as a job, then take some advice from Sagmeister on how to keep loving what we do. He says that 80% of many design students become disillusioned with the work they tend to do, while others are still stuck in terms of technical tools. He says, “I feel that we’ve been trained to produce work to please our lecturers or choose a tried and tested method to expand our reputation as a designer. This is not the way to lose passion in our work, because you really have to look at the possibility of doing something different, something that has no function. By doing this frequently, I say ‘we can make our job become our calling again.”

The ability to research and understand our product or project is critical. Sagmeister points out that design is about doing “good ideas.” ‘Good ideas’ are formed through the process of asking questions and answering them, and the process of solving problems.

It is the power of taking time off from the usual routes, schedules, commitments, and environments that really makes material in such a way that it becomes a rich experience in which one can gain a knowledge that can ultimately contribute to our designs. As design history proves, creative ideas can be found in the simplest things. Thinking and writing manual for an art can just be.” And “It makes perfect sense to look for them, we also have the freedom to pick our clients. We can start by asking ourselves questions like; ‘What is a part of design?’ ‘What do we think about when we get up in the morning?’ ‘What do we think about when we go to bed at night?’ ‘What projects do we work on all the time?’ ‘What projects do we work on most?’ ‘What projects do we work on less commonly?’ ‘What projects do we work on more commonly?’ ‘What do I like most of all my projects?’ ‘What do I like least of all my projects?’

For the design students, Sagmeister emphasizes that it is important to maintain a passion for the design field. It is important to continue working as a designer, regardless of the field. Sagmeister says, “The reason why I enjoy working with different mediums is because it is always different. It is always a new challenge.”

It is essential to maintain a passion for the design field. It is important to continue working as a designer, regardless of the field. Sagmeister says, “The reason why I enjoy working with different mediums is because it is always different. It is always a new challenge.”

SAGMEISTER’S DECONSTRUCTION OF A PAIR OF LEVIS.

PHOTO: MIKE LEVIN

DESIGNER’S RULES

CAREER PATHS IN GRAPHIC DESIGN

DEGREE IN GRAPHIC DESIGN OR SIMILAR FIELD

IN CREATIVE

TA Artist/ Junior Designer/ Visualiser

Senior Designer

Junior Art Director

Senior Art Director

Assistant Creative Director

Creative Director

ACCOUNT SERVICING

Account Executive

Senior Account Executive

Assistant Account Executive

Senior Account Executive Manager

Associate Account

Creative Director

Assistant Director

Account Director

Senior Account Director

Regional Account Director

Head of Client Services

IN- HOUSE

In-House Designer

In-House Illustrator

In-House Photographer

In-House Writer

In-House Producer

Senior Art Director

Senior Account Director

Head of Client Services

OTHERS

Freelance Graphic designer

Freelance Illustrator

Freelance Photographer

Freelance Writer

Freelance Producer

Senior Art Director

Senior Account Director

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PHOTO: MIKE LEVIN

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Senior Account Director

Head of Client Services

PHOTO: MIKE LEVIN
WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN IN-HOUSE DESIGNER?

By LISANNE YEOH
lisanne.yeoh@leaderonomics.com

ICTONARY.com defines graphic design as “the art or profession of visual communication that combines images, words, and ideas to convey information to an audience.”

A graphic designer is responsible for arranging the various artistic elements using different types of media. The forms of presentation may include posters, banners, brochures, packaging, corporate identity, ads, magazines or websites. It is a world fuelled by imagination and infused with shapes and colours. You begin with an idea, which becomes a rough sketch. The sketch progresses and transforms into a graphic visual. When printing is required, it can be something done in house, or outsourced to an external vendor. The process may be very hands-on from conceptualisation, through production to installation. Don’t expect to just be working in front of the computer!

IN-HOUSE VERSUS EXTERNAL DESIGNERS

An in-house designer works exclusively for a company, and is usually responsible for creating all the media collateral for the company. Conversely, one may be a designer working in a production house, or advertising agency. In this case you will work for many clients, and produce work for an array of companies. As an in-house designer, there is a closer relationship between you and the company. You are essentially promoting the company, and it is therefore important that your organisation’s vision, values and work ethics resonate with you. It makes a huge difference in your work and helps you find fulfillment in what you do. At my previous (and current) company, the company values aligned with mine. I also experience a sense of community through the people and culture. It gives me a sense of identity and prestige too, as I take pride in my work. I play a major role in creating the look and feel of the experiences and encounters that our customers have with the company.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF BEING AN IN-HOUSE DESIGNER?

Being in-house allows you to become really focused and specialised in your role because you own and know your brand inside out. Your design directly influences the company’s image and needs to be consistent in terms of the message and style. You are able to get things done faster and more effectively by having direct access to your “clients”. Briefings and feedback sessions can be arranged quickly and with relative ease. You may have better control of your time, as schedules are more accessible and predictable enabling you to be able to gauge the kind of job you will be expecting the next day, week or month. Deadlines may be more manageable as you can manage or negotiate your work priorities. Stress levels are definitely present but on the lower end, when compared with ad agencies. If you join a larger organisation, you will also enjoy the opportunities and benefits it offers. There is more structure and stability in the way things are done. Pay cheques are received with regularity, and you don’t have to worry about how you will pay your bills at the end of every month. There is also great internal support. For example, when you need technical support, just dial an extension to the IT department and ask for help. Many vendors would want to be associated with you as part of a large or established organisation. People may even associate you with the brand or company you represent. I have often had the experience where acquaintances I meet for a second or third time remember the company I work for, but not my name!

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DRAWBACKS?

On the flip side, work can get a bit mundane when you only have one client – your own company. Your creativity may also be limited to the organisation’s style and guidelines. This is when you need to push your boundaries further, to be creative within the guidelines and still be able to deliver good work. Always seize opportunities to be involved in interesting projects that allow you the space to be creative and experimental in building your design portfolio. Usually, you are also limited by resources when you don’t have a design team to work with and brainstorm ideas. You will most likely be the only designer, or part of a small team. Often the “supporting” role that you play in delivering design services may not be viewed with the same importance as those of other departments. Sometimes, in the urgency to meet sales targets, aesthetics may not be top priority for management. There usually are not many training opportunities within the company that are specifically catered to the in-house designer’s needs.

After some time, in-house designers may feel detached from the creative industry at large, as well as from the design trends prevalent in the market. It is up to you to ensure that you remain current with the new developments, trends and innovations in the industry.

Whether you work for an agency, a production house, or are an in-house designer for a company – it is important to stay inspired. Generally, I’m happy with my job and don’t have to drag my feet to go to work every day. What inspires me, and keeps me going, other than the people and the culture of the company, is the sense of achievement and satisfaction that I get when I see my work being produced. This sense of achievement is heightened when other people, especially my boss like and affirm my designs. This makes me love what I do!
A GOOD teacher can inspire students to reach new heights. Izmer Ahmad is an art professor, and indeed one such inspirational teacher in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, where I am completing my PhD. These past few years, I am amazed at how far out of my comfort zone Izmer has pushed me. He challenges, encourages, motivates and expects better and more from me every time I interact with him.

Not many people understand what a university professor does. In fact, most people believe professors have cushy jobs in academia that comprise only a few hours of teaching and student interaction. They underestimate the dedication involved in going through stacks of student papers, keeping up with reading, preparing for daily classes and most importantly, spending free time doing research to ensure continuous self-growth. This is not forgetting the years of study required before you are officially recognised as a professor. In Izmer’s case, his commitment is further proven by the fact that his wife and two children are living in Canada, whilst he continues to inspire students in Malaysia.

Izmer is no different to the various “world-class” university professors elsewhere. He teaches four “master-level” classes. These are research methods and studio practice, contemporary art theory, selected topics in visual arts and professional practice, all of which take up about 12 hours a week. His classes are engaging and stimulating. This takes a great deal of effort on his part. He also supervises eight students (including a number of PhD level students like myself) in their dissertations that vary from “paper making processes” to “modern art in South-East Asia.”

THE AVID RESEARCHER

Being a tenured professor in a research university, he appreciates the autonomy he has to explore his own research interests, not being encumbered in any way by the university requirements. Attaining tenure status entails a series of examinations at different levels. There are various tests to move one up the ladder from the position of lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor to professor. This varies from one university to another, but in USM, it includes the capacity for research, teaching, and supervisory skills as well as knowledge of procedures in government institutions. Academic tenure is usually awarded to professors who have a solid track record as researchers. Izmer varies from one university to another, but in USM, it includes the capacity for research, teaching, and supervisory skills as well as knowledge of procedures in government institutions. Academic tenure is usually awarded to professors who have a solid track record as researchers. Izmer values these abilities and arranging to meet those select few who are just as committed to teaching as they are to research, realising that their research ultimately contributes to their competence as teachers. Izmer remarks that if you just want to teach, without doing any research work, or vice versa, then this job is probably not for you.

Izmer received his PhD from the University of Victoria in Canada. He also met his Canadian wife there and spent a few years working and teaching in Canada before coming home to make a difference in the field of art in Malaysia.

THE CONSUMMATE TEACHER

Being a teacher, administrator, researcher, and artist all rolled into one, Izmer has a hectic schedule. His day starts at 9am and ends at 2am with students knocking on his door even after 5pm to catch up with him. They pretend to invite him for tea, but actually have the intention of picking his brain. Most students say they find themselves lucky to be under his supervision. Any serious PhD student will tell you that a great supervisor is hard to find. A good supervisor who is well-read on an eclectic number of topics, and who can make connections between what you are doing with contemporary art theory, is key to ensuring your academic work is valued in the global art community.

As I get to know Izmer more, I realise that becoming a university professor is more than just a day job that you can “turn off” after lecturing hours. Izmer’s devotion to teaching and research clearly affects what he does outside of teaching. He recently held a solo exhibition in Galeri Seni Mutia, Georgetown titled “Sensation of Images,”. Veteran artist Ismail Hashim said that this exhibition evoked “magic and soul”.

THE ARTIST

Most people view art theory and art history as boring subjects. In fact, the same can be said of many academic subjects. Izmer takes a different approach to art history and teaching. He has learnt to tell his students stories that bring art history to life. He brings passion back to art history - a skill absent in many art classrooms.

As a practising artist, he seems to encourage the type of art that is guided and sustained by critical theory. As an artist and researcher, he helps his students connect the dots between the artworks they seek to explicate and the artistic discourse and cultural contexts that they are engaged in. His own background in studio practice, art theory, and philosophy gives him an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship. In his supervisory role, he particularly encourages his students to move away from the notion that artworks have an absolute value or absolute interpretation. Instead, he inspires them to traverse different academic disciplines in order to discover new perspectives in the interpretation and practice of art. His personal research interests range from drawing, contemporary art, modern South-East Asian art to the subject of death.

Izmer says: “The best part about doing what I do is being able to work with students and co-researchers to gain new knowledge.”

Emelia Ong Ian Li is hopeful, like her mentor, to become a researcher and teacher that makes a difference. She is currently doing research on art and identity in Malaysia.

By AUDREY TONG
audrey.tong@leaderonomics.com

URING the leadership camps which we conduct for teenagers, we often ask campers which they think is more important: being book smart or street smart. In other words, is it more important to have high academic qualifications or savvy industry experience? After much debate and discussion, the verdict is usually 50/50, as the youths decide that both are of equal importance in contributing towards the success of a leader. The question is: Are they given sufficient exposure in both areas?

We once had an intelligent camper who got nervous when required to speak in front of a group of people. She performed well academically but found it challenging to stand up in front of a crowd. One day, she decided to step out of her comfort zone and volunteered to share her experiences during a large gathering. She told me that it was such an unthinkable thing for her to do but because she was pushed to do it during the camp, she realised that she had in her to accomplish such a feat. It was the experience that she had already accumulated, that gave her the courage and confidence to know that she could deliver.

This and many other stories led me to believe that while we are providing sufficient avenues for our youths to excel academically, we still lack the ability to provide them with the structures and opportunities to grow in their leadership and practical skills. We tend to assume that they will pick up these lessons and skills along the way and hopefully get better as time goes by. It does not always turn out this way. However, it is never too late to take the initiative and make a change.

Key highlights:
- Adaptable & assertive speaking skills, leading with confidence, handling peer pressure, managing friendships.
- Communication & public speaking skills, leading with confidence, self-awareness.

Target:
- 5–8 Dec 2012
- 12-13 year olds
- To discuss issues they might face as they transition from primary to secondary school.
- Key highlights: Adaptable & assertive, handling peer pressure, managing friendships.

- 3–8 Dec 2012
- 14–16 year olds
- To develop their leadership potential. This camp will build the foundations of leadership and allow youth to explore their skills and talents in a safe environment.
- Key highlights: Communication & public speaking skills, leadership with confidence, self-awareness.

- 7–12 Jan 2013
- 17–19 year olds after SPM/STPM
- To discuss issues they might face as they move towards tertiary education or the working world.
- Key highlights: Personal development plan, core values, building CVs, career sharing.

DIODE Leadership Camps are designed specifically for youth between the ages of 12–19, who want to fulfill their potential to become great leaders of the future! We aim to help young people grow their capacity and courage to step up and seize life changing opportunities. Come join us for great fun and amazing learning!
WHAT did you learn in the 14 to 16 years you spent in the school system, from primary one to university? You would probably have been put through the academic grill throughout your primary and secondary school years, being told repeatedly that academic excellence trumps everything else. The emphasis was always on scoring in examinations. Getting As was, and still is for school kids, a badge of honour. Parents would push away extra curricular activities if they interfered with tuition.

University is where you sink or swim. Things are taught a little differently at this level, albeit with the same academic thrust. You find you now have to think. That’s right. Instead of answering multiple-choice questions, you have to analyse the subject matter. Sentences morph into paragraphs. It’s no longer sufficient to know the final answer; you also have to show how you arrive at this conclusion.

And that’s just the studying part. What about socialisation skills? Where do you fit in in university? University acts as an incubator of sorts for the transition into the real world. EQ, or emotional intelligence, is something that is grossly neglected in our schooling years, often making way for the traditional measure of intelligence, IQ (intelligence quotient). In layman terms, EQ means the ability to relate to people around us as well as to situations life throws at us. It is how one handles the self, in everything from day-to-day interactions to challenging or adverse situations.

It is only in the last five to 10 years that people have started paying attention to EQ as an essential skill. The workplace becomes a great arena for EQ, as lack thereof. Employers who don’t understand emotional intelligence often fail to find themselves placed with disparate personalities that do not blend into the company culture. Employees themselves, discover the difficulties of navigating relational minefields in the workplace.

Often, stories are heard about otherwise brilliant people who leave good companies. These brilliant individuals feel shackled and undervalued. The respective companies have failed to retain this talent. There is the sneaking suspicion that EQ is probably at the root of these problems.

When individuals are not fully equipped to deal with curveballs thrown at them at work, their coping mechanisms fail them. This applies to both managers and subordinates. A manager lacking in EQ may not be able to pick up on an employee’s frustrations and dissatisfaction; similarly, an employee may not have the skills to communicate his or her needs to the company, or perhaps even lack motivation to overcome problems at work.

Having a high EQ does not only boil down to great social skills; it’s the inherent ability to identify, interpret, and initiate appropriate behaviour in any given situation. We’ve all had days when everything seems to be going wrong. Random people are hurling insults and making scathing comments. Projects go off track. Bosses seem extra-demanding, and subordinates are not performing at their best.

Someone with developed EQ would be able to see through these clouds to the silver lining, enabling him or her to turn back from the day’s blows, ready to face another day tomorrow. He or she would have formulated an action plan to power through the day.

People with lesser honed EQ would probably wallow in self-pity and frustration, unable to break through the haze of problems. These people would allow themselves to get demotivated as time goes on, even imagining negative scenarios that have yet to happen.

Does Generation Y fare any better? Perhaps not! This generation has a known lament that employers lack Gen-Xers, and vice versa. Whilst it is a generation that speaks up and questions establishments, it is also one that finds itself floundering when it comes to sustainable, long-term relationships (i.e. staying at a job long enough to learn or see a start-up through to the end).

The late Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, was known to be brilliant, as well as extremely difficult to work with. The words “college dropout” usually accompany his name. Yes, he didn’t finish school. He was also a dictator in the office. In fact, you would say he had little or no EQ when it came to the workplace. Yet he was the most successful entrepreneur of our generation. His personality sold millions of Apple products. He single-handedly led the company to the greatest heights imaginable. So what does EQ have to do with it?

EQ has everything to do with it. Perhaps lacking in social skills himself, he had the foresight to hire people whom he knew could work highly developed EQ. So in a roundabout way, Jobs was acute and savvy, knowing himself well enough to know the type of people he needed to propel the company to great success. Now that is what we call emotional intelligence.

Victor Loh is a passionate advocate for life skill education for youth and children. He is also a best-selling author, award-winning marketer, corporate trainer and entrepreneur. If you would like to connect with him, email him at loh.victor@gmail.com.
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Mistake! Mistake! Mistake!

Dear Careernomers,

I am working in a firm for a few months now and find it difficult to deal with some of the more senior staff. Naturally, the bosses listen to everything they say, and these senior staff take every opportunity they can to speak loudly about my mistakes in front of the bosses, and tell me off for every small mistake I make, so that everyone hears. There is no training provided to newcomers like myself and I feel that this constant telling off in front of others can shape a bad opinion of my work quality. In addition to that, there is a manager that always shouts on top of her voice even for the slightest error, which sets a bad example to the older staff. None of them are willing to teach us how to improve. In a workplace, you should have teamwork and support – how can people behave like this? Please advise.

Warmest regards,

Selina

Frustrated at work

Dear Careernomers,

I am working in a firm for a few months now and find it difficult to deal with some of the more senior staff. Naturally, the bosses listen to everything they say, and these senior staff take every opportunity they can to speak loudly about my mistakes in front of the bosses, and tell me off for every small mistake I make, so that everyone hears. There is no training provided to newcomers like myself and I feel that this constant telling off in front of others can shape a bad opinion of my work quality. In addition to that, there is a manager that always shouts on top of her voice even for the slightest error, which sets a bad example to the older staff. None of them are willing to teach us how to improve. In a workplace, you should have teamwork and support – how can people behave like this? Please advise.

Warmest regards,

Selina

Hi Selina,

I am so sorry to hear about your predicament. Firstly, if it is any comfort to you, there are many people in the same boat as you are in the workplace. This situation is something we see quite often and I’ve personally experienced it as well when I first started out in my career. I was working for an accounting firm, in fact one of the Big Five at the time. The situation that I faced was similar to the one you mentioned or perhaps even worse. I had a manager who threw an entire file of paperwork across the workspace just to embarrass you and let you know that you did not meet expectations. There were seniors who blamed you for their mistakes. Poor greenhorns like us just suffered in silence or left the organisation when we could no longer take it.

Why does this happen? It could be because of a few things:

1. Your seniors (the ones who have been with the company since it started) may be fearful and insecure. When you are hired, you are the newbie, the young person who is supposed to be full of energy and talent. The seniors may have a tendency to feel a bit nervous and insecure. They may be worried that you would surpass them and threaten their positions in the company. Because of this, they become defensive and try to protect their job/territory/rice bowl. Not wanting to teach you yet making you look bad is their way of protecting themselves. Perhaps it will make you feel better, if you were to pity them. They come to work each day worried that the young entrants in the company are a threat to them. This is not in defence of their actions at all.

2. Perhaps they had similar situations in the past, and have learned these bad behaviours from them? They now feel that you need to go through the “School of Hard Knocks” so to speak. Either way, the more of these ironies that you have to endure, the stronger you get. However, if the stress becomes unbearable, you should consider a change in jobs.

3. It may be that during the course of you joining the company, you stepped on their toes without realising it. They may be holding some grudges against you.

4. Maybe, just maybe, you really have not been performing to the expected standards. In this case, it would be great to get some feedback. I know this may be tough given their attitude and resistance to newbies.

I can’t really tell if your working environment allows you to have direct access to your managers (not for the purposes of complaining but rather with regard to the viability of your work). I hope that some of your bosses will be able to see your work and that it will speak for itself instead of just relying on what other seniors say.

Another idea or strategy I can pass on to you to counter this situation is to get your teeth, suck in your pride and anger towards your seniors, and ask one of them to be your mentor. I know it sounds like sucking up to them, but it is a strategy that I’ve seen work with younger people and graduates joining companies. When you ask one of them to be your mentor, you probably have to approach it in a manner where you acknowledge that he or she has a lot more experience than you do, and that the person are so good that you really wish to learn from them. They may or may not agree. Some may, but most would rarely turn down the offer to be the “Big Sister/Big Brother” figure for someone else. By asking them personally to be a mentor, it makes them feel like you are not a threat to them. Instead, it gives the impression that you want to be taken under their wing and be guided by them. They become your “guru/sifu” and you would become their disciple. You would thus neutralise their tendency to go against you, and you might even find that they would teach you and defend you in the future. They would want to protect you, in your performance would be a direct reflection on them personally, as well as on how effective their training is.

And lastly, please reflect on your actions as well. Let it not be because of your own attitude/actions at work that this situation has arisen. Sometimes, we only see others as the cause of the problem and forget to analyse our own actions. It is good to take time to ensure you have displayed the humble, learning attitude and respect for your seniors before you start believing that the fault lies externally.

I wish you all the best, Selina, and I hope that this helps. If all else fails and you find yourself being so stressed out and constantly anxious about going to work, it may be wise to consider a change in job so as not to suffer from anxiety attacks or depression.

Regards,

Ang Hui Ming

Hi Selina,

Every now and then we find ourselves in a difficult situation where we decide to fight or flight, just like where you are right now. First things first, you have to decide if this is a battle worth fighting. To help you assess, some things to think about include:

1. Can I still learn on this job?
2. Will staying in this company contribute to me achieving my long-term goals?
3. If I stay on, what are my reasons and are they justified?

Once you have considered this and find that there are benefits in staying on, then I suggest you be prepared with the following “strategies” for your “battle”:

1. Look for alliances
I’m not sure, but I hope there would be at least ONE colleague who is nice and have been there long enough to know how to deal with these seniors.

2. Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer – Sun Tzu
Get to know your seniors and their work styles and expectations. Perhaps once you understand these, you will be able to deliver according to their expectation and more. They may also then see that you are making an effort to improve at work. As they don’t provide any training, it doesn’t mean you can’t be informally trained by them. Take the initiative.

3. Guard your heart
No one can guarantee you a change in your superiors. If you manage to break the barrier between you and them, that’s great! Otherwise, if they do not change, be in control of your emotions and do not let these “bullies” make you feel that you are not good enough.

4. Draw boundaries
The last bit before you enter this battle, is to know from the beginning at what point you would retreat. Assuming the situation doesn’t improve, you need to decide now what you would do later. You can define your boundaries in a few manners. For example:

Timing: Give it x number of months and if things don’t get better, then it’s time to move on.

Seniors’ conduct: If their insults get personal, then it’s time to move on.

Your emotional state: If you start crying every night thinking about this, then it’s time to move on.

Learning: If you have learnt what you want to, then it’s time to move on.

These boundaries can differ and it is really up to you to define them and keep by them. Though I think no one deserves to be bullied, sometimes staying and fighting a tough battle can really help us grow tremendously.

It’s a choice you make – fight or flight?

All the best!

Regards,

Elisa Dass

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of myStarjob.com
coming up in next saturday’s issue . . .

Different cultures are constantly interacting in our work places. Read as we dive into this world of multiculturalism and cross-cultural collaboration.

Also next week

Polish-American Andrew Filipowski shares his stellar career journey from chair welder to billionaire software entrepreneur.

An organisation’s culture determines its success, writes Roshan Thiran in Be a Leader.

What is Shared Services? TalentCorp gives an insightful overview on this exciting US$2.9bil a year industry.

Debbie Pozzobon sheds light on how to manage and harness the strength of cultural differences in Hard Talk.