ARE YOU A STRATEGIC INFLUENCER?

A few weeks ago, I was trying to get my son to eat his vegetables and was not winning the battle to get the greens into his mouth. I was just about to badger him into submission by yellling out that he would not be able to play football with me, when I recalled an important lesson on influencing. No one ever influences anyone by threats and commands. In fact, I know the No. 1 rule of influencing someone (especially your children) is to make the vegetables more appealing by showcasing that everyone else is eating them. So, I just told my son that all his friends were eating their vegetables and he would be the only one not doing so. He somehow seemed happy to chomp on his greens.

People love to follow the crowd. No matter how much you believe that you are not influenced by others, the truth is we are influenced by what others are doing and saying.

We tend to enjoy songs that others listen to - the best example being the Gangnam Style. We tend to dress like others and we have seen it happen so often, we tend to even engage in unlawful acts when we see others do it.

A few years ago, the crime rate in a town started to rise. There were warnings and threats issued and strict laws enacted. There were big “Do Not Steal” posters installed but these didn’t reduce the crime rate. In fact, crime became worse in those areas where warnings were posted. Finally, there was a smart campaign that highlighted that the majority of people did not steal. Surprisingly the campaign worked. In fact, in London, a new campaign kicked off called the “99 percent”. The campaign has posters all over London stating that “99 percent of young Londoners DO NOT COMMIT serious violence”.

Influence is critical for our success in life and in business. So, how do you influence? This week in our career guide, we look at how to strategically influence. There are numerous parts to influencing effectively. According to research done in Harvard by Nolan Ambyad, it takes only six seconds for people to judge us. These six seconds are our window of influence. Body language, words, your appearance, harnessing the power of story-telling and using various means of concessions are all part of the influencing arsenal. Are you able to influence? If not, read on and find out some of the secrets of influencing from the guru of influencing Eric Lau in his centrepiece feature on pages 8 and 9. Lau is one of the most talented trainers and his highly acclaimed training programme “Strategic influencing” has helped thousands of Malaysians learn the art and science of influencing.

So, read on this week and we do hope you enjoy our career guide. There are many other special articles on various other topics that we hope will inspire you to keep learning and growing every day of your life. Don’t forget to keep leveraging our amazing videos and other resources which can be accessed at www.leaderonomics.com. We wish you all the best in your career journeys! We hope you have as much fun with this pullout as me and my team at leaderonomics have had putting it all together. If you do have any feedback on the pullout, feel free to email me and my team from leaderonomics at mystarjob@leaderonomics.com. We love all feedback (we believe it’s a gift from you to us regardless of the nature of the feedback). So do send us your thoughts, ideas and aspirations for the pullout. Have a super weekend!

Warm regards,

ROSHAN THIRAN
Editor, myStarjob.com & CEO, Leaderonomics
Baking the ‘baking’ bug

THE DELECTABLE STORY OF A CAKE ARTIST

BY PREMA JAYABALAN
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SHE had a high-flying job as a flight stewardess. Two years down the road, she realised that this was not her cup of tea and she moved on to be a radio traffic news presenter with Astro. There, Sheryl Bito found contentment as she loved her job, had a wonderful boss and a great working scene. This Malacca-born lass decided to start cooking and baking as a hobby four years ago. She posted her recipes on her blog to be shared amongst friends. What started off as cooking recipes slowly evolved to baking.

“I started to like baking and began giving it a shot for a while. I eventually chanced upon a baking class where we were taught how to decorate cupcakes. That really got me interested and I went home and researched on the baking industry. I learnt how to do custom cake decorating and fondant icing decoration. You can say that I got bitten by the baking bug as I kept practising to improve myself,” reminisces Bito when asked on how she became a full-time home-based cake artist.

Bito was doing all this whilst still holding a job in Astro. Once, Bito took a cake order from a colleague and when word got around about how delicious her cake was, more orders kept pouring in.

Thus, she began her stint as a part-time cake artist. She used to get home from work and start working on her orders. She mostly baked cakes and cupcakes. She often finished baking after midnight.

“It started to get really overwhelming to juggle my job and baking at the same time. The orders were increasing and I could not handle them. After giving it a serious thought and discussing it with my boss, I decided to quit my job and give baking a chance by going on a full-time basis. There were a lot of things to consider as my job had many perks but I knew that if I never took the plunge then I would never know of the outcome. So, in 2012, I became a home-based cake artist.”

For Bito, her typical day starts at 9.30am. She checks her job sheet to see the orders she has for the day. Then she starts baking cakes or cupcakes. Bito is quite well-known for her fondant icing. It is like plasticine and I mould the shapes and figurines requested by customers using this icing.

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“Once the cake is baked, it takes about three to four hours to cool before I can start decorating it. During this time, I start preparing the ingredients needed for decorating the cake. I use fondant icing. It is like plasticine and I mould the shapes and figurines requested by customers using this icing. Figurines required by customers have to be moulded and it is not an easy feat at all, though some people think that it is.”

According to Bito, the toughest part in baking is the decorating. This work usually takes about six to eight hours and can go on longer depending on the intricacy of the design requested by customers. After the cake cooled, Bito starts torting the cake into layers and filling them with butter cream and ganache. Then she adds the crumb coating ganache followed by the fondant icing and finally she adds on the figurines that are created by her.

“Most of the time, the customers tell me what figurines they want. Sometimes, they give me a vague idea and I will work on the figurines that best suit the theme. Once I have decided on the figurines, I will ask for my customers’ opinions before I start to mould them according to the preferred colour. If it is a cartoon character, then the standard colour is used.”

“With cupcakes, you have to be even more careful as they are more difficult. This is because cupcakes come in a large number and you have to make sure that each figurine is moulded exactly the same size for all the cupcakes. There has to be a standard for all the cupcakes unless the customer requests for different designs on each one,” she explains.

Bito receives the most orders for birthday cakes. She has quite a big number of orders for children’s birthday parties and quite a number involves stacks of cupcakes. She also bakes wedding cakes.

On the days when she is free, Bito checks her emails for new orders and requests. She gets 10 to 15 enquiries and discussions matters clearly before taking up an order. She also stocks up on her baking necessities on the days when she has no orders, which are quite rare.

“The baking industry is rapidly growing and there are many home-based cake artists now. The competition is getting tough. Some of them offer lower prices. I have had some customers comparing my prices with other cake artists.

However, I use only the purest ingredients for my cakes, cupcakes and decorating icing. They are considered to be on the high-end but that is healthy and good. I believe in using these products because if I don’t find my product good, then it is not good for others, thus I do not compromise when it comes to quality,” says Bito when asked about the challenges she faced in her job.

Nevertheless, this is not a hindrance to Bito as she enjoys what she is doing. She finds it liberating to come up with her own creative methods to decorate her cakes. She still remembers her first ever baking order. She made cupcakes for her brother’s wedding.

“I felt on top of the world when I completed the cupcakes. I felt so proud of myself and I felt that I could accomplish anything after this. Everyone complimented me on the cupcakes and that was enough to make my day.”

Bito’s plan for the future is to start a studio and run classes on cake baking and decorating. She would like to start a learning centre and hold workshops to teach the art of cake decoration. She believes that if you want to do something and have put your heart into it, then you should go ahead and proceed without thinking twice. This is exactly what she has done for herself.

“I believe that baking is science. It is all about the art of learning and mastering it. For me, I always believe that this profession found me”. 
Leaders are never produced by accident.

Leaders are not born. We believe everyone has the potential to become great leaders. We at Leaderonomics have uncovered the science to building leaders. Leaders are produced through proper cultivation by being pushed constantly to break their perceived boundaries. At Leaderonomics, we can help you build a strong leadership pipeline that will bring your organisation and your people to greater heights. Our leadership solutions include the following:

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www.leaderonomics.com
DO YOU HAVE DREAMS OR MEMORIES?

PAST GLORIES MAY STIFLE GROWTH AND INNOVATION

By ROSHAN THIAN
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HOMAS Friedman distinguishes society by whether they are driven by dreams or memories. Countries driven by dreams are forward-looking, innovative, open to new ideas and competitive. Those driven by rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia tend to focus all their energies on making the imagined past even more beautiful than it ever was and then cling to these memories of the past instead of dreaming and building a better tomorrow.

At its peak, the Roman empire could claim to control 70% of the known world. After centuries of avarice and prosperity, it became weak as it started focusing on past glories, closing the door to external growth, causing a growth of parasites from within including senators, Caesars, pride, as well as a decline in civic cohesion. The same applies to many corporations and individuals.

Michael Hammer, business guru and author adds: “One thing that tells me that a company is in trouble is that it started focusing on past glories, closing the door to external growth, causing a growth of parasites from within including senators, Caesars, pride, as well as a decline in civic cohesion. The same applies to many corporations and individuals.”

Martin Luther King understood the power of dreams to build hope about the past. “If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today I still have a dream.”

Leaders understand that people are driven by hope. Past glories make a person proud. Pride is usually a recipe for disaster as it blocks your ability to see your true situation. Many pride-filled companies with a chequered past, fail to deal with current issues that plague them as they are blinded by this pridefulness.

There is a story of a man who walked into a friend’s home, bruised and bleeding. When asked what had happened, the injured friend replied: “While walking in Bangkok, I was mugged by two thugs who wanted all my money. I didn’t want to give it to them, so I fought them and got badly injured!”

The man, who was shocked that his friend fought off thugs, then asked how much money he had when he was attacked. “Three ringgit,” he answered. “You fought for three ringgit?” his friend exclaimed. “Yes,” replied the wounded man. “I didn’t want to reveal my financial situation.”

Many companies are just like this man. They would rather win small, meaningless battles than avoid the reality of their current plight of being exposed. Memories tend to re-ignite the passion in many to continue working hard and fighting for lost causes. Nelson Mandela fought for 27 years for a cause he championed. But when he became president of South Africa, he quit after his first term, even though he could have stayed on. Most CEOs or country leaders find it hard to quit when they should, often because pride gets in their way.

Reinvention begins when pride is discarded together with all assumptions that constrict growth.

“Analysts have always tended to measure by classical economic and social statistics... Such statistics are important and revealing. But there is another statistic that I think is even more important and revealing. Does your society have more memories than dreams or more dreams than memories?” - Thomas Friedman

Sheth believes that many of industries’ legacy and heritage are more of a liability than an asset. The reluctance to change, the natural tendency to follow a “prevailing wisdom”, and look backward to the past are their real problems. “Companies will thrive under tough times by challenging existing dogma,” he concludes.

Banking is a great example where most big banks were reluctant to take part in micro-financing – the lending of small sums to the poor – even with their high net margins and profits. Banks held on to their outdated prevailing wisdom and refused to change their policies, thereby losing out in the process.

Looking back to the past is not a bad thing. But when the past and present become a frame that locks you inside the corners, then it becomes harder to look outside the frame.

John Maxwell’s “law of the lid” claims that every person or organisation has a lid or ceiling. Once a person reaches his limit and hits the ceiling, there can be no more growth. Companies that hit the lid often look back to the “good old days” instead of pushing the barriers off the lid.

Dreamers lift the lid of their organisations with a compelling vision of the future.

Companies at the top tend to become content, reactive to changes and preferring to maintain status quo. One person who defied this was Andrea Jung, who was at the helm of Avon for many years. Jung worked tirelessly to proactively “reinvent herself” yearly.

She had a unique way of firing herself and then re-hiring a “new” Jung the following week so that she would see things in a different light and do things differently. She said, “Fire yourself on a Friday night and come in on Monday morning as if you had never given heed to past glories, even abandoning and selling off “sacred” traditions with a compelling vision of the future.”

Siemens Medical discarded its past tradition of selling its product only to hospitals and began questioning every business assumption ever made. By abandoning its long-held beliefs of the past, it changed its product marketing and sales strategy, redesigning and simplifying its complex product line, enabling it to lower costs by 30% and increase market share to unprecedented levels.

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10. Learn how to value criticism

More often than not, we only value praise. We are elated when people speak kind words to us, but feel miserable when we are criticised. If we only tune ourselves to praise, we will never make progress. We should learn how to invite constructive criticism and appreciate suggestions.

9. Don’t get defensive

It’s a natural reaction to get defensive when being criticised. However, it is important to fight that urge. Your critic might have something important to say, but you’ll never pick up on it if you’re too busy thinking about how to defend yourself.

8. Control your body language

Many times, body language speaks louder than words. Don’t clench your teeth or fists, cross your arms, or have an angry expression while listening. Bad body language can send the wrong message to your critics and turn a potentially positive situation into a negative one.

7. Respond to the criticism, not the tone

The problem with criticism is that its tone and style can turn a person’s attention away from the valuable suggestions given. Even if someone speaks in an angry or condescending tone, you need to detach his emotions from the constructive suggestions.

6. Disregard destructive criticism

If you can see that the person criticising you is being personal and hurtful rather than constructive, it is better to just let it slide. Don’t take it too seriously, or personally. However, it might be constructive to find out what the person has against you so you can figure out how to get back into his good books.

5. Don’t respond immediately

Never react immediately! It is best to wait a little while before responding. If you react with feelings of anger or injured pride, you will soon regret your actions. Wait patiently, so you can reflect and respond in a calmer way.

4. Keep the conversation productive

If you know that your critic is correct about a situation, own up and offer an apology if necessary. Thank him for taking the time to offer you feedback. If you believe that the criticism may be wrong, state your opinion, but agree to reflect upon the issue.

3. Decide on ways to improve yourself

Don’t let criticism destroy you! Most of the time, criticism is given with a constructive intention in mind. Instead of feeling dejected, figure out ways to improve your performance and to develop your skills.

2. Avoid blaming somebody else

To err is human. So, don’t act like you can do no wrong and push the blame on somebody else. Admitting your mistakes and resolving them shows that you can be entrusted with bigger tasks and that you take full responsibility for what is assigned to you.

1. Accept it positively!

If you threaten to quit or feel completely destroyed at the slightest word of criticism, chances are you take things too personally. Realise that your critic has nothing against you, but instead thinks that you can use some improvement. This will ultimately help you accept criticism in the right spirit!
ARK Gallagher is a renowned name in the world of Formula One. He is the former head of Cosworth’s F1 business unit, head of commercial affairs at Jaguar/Red Bull racing and marketing director at Jordan Grand Prix, who is equipped with priceless business lessons learned from a diverse career spanning almost 30 years at the forefront of Formula One. He is currently the managing director of COS Motor Sport Ltd where he assists companies seeking to utilise Formula One as part of their global sports-marketing activities, and also offers his expertise in managing Formula One projects into major companies which want to learn how to build “winning teams.” He has worked in Formula One and international motor racing both in the media and the business-side of the industry.

HOW IT STARTED

Gallagher was born in Ireland. As a child, he always had a fetish for fast sports that comprised downhill skiing and, of course, Formula One. He recalls being fascinated when watching races on TV when he was about eight or nine years of age. From a young age, he had that seed of passion for this sport deeply planted into his heart and ultimately decided to find a career in it. This urge influenced him to have a huge respect for the history of the sport and the ability of Formula One to entertain and motivate people of all ages around the world.

In 1983, Gallagher moved to the UK after graduating from Queen University (Belfast) in economics. He worked in Formula One and international motor racing both in the media and the business-side of the industry.

By PREMA JAYABALAN
prema.jayabalain@leaderononics.com

The FIA press conference (back row clockwise from left) Mark Gallagher (GBR) Cosworth F1 general manager, Adam Parr (GBR) CEO Williams, Jean-Francois Cautet (FRA) Renault head of communications, Stefano Domenicali (ITA) Ferrari general director and Jose Carabante Aguiler (ESP) Grupo Hispania.

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MARK GALLAGHER

MY FAVOURITE RACER

My favourite racer would be Michael Schumacher due to his huge talent, commitment to winning and intelligent approach to being a Formula One driver. He made his debut for my team, Jordan Grand Prix, in 1991 and we then watched him win seven World Championships for drivers at the Benetton and Ferrari teams. His career record is formidable, but for me the most impressive aspect is his work-ethic and great relationship with his teams. Gallagher has a few words of wisdom to share with all those aspiring to be successful racers. According to him, if someone wants to be a racing driver, it is important to have more than driving skills. You have to understand the importance of sponsorship and how to fund your career, how to work with the media and create the right kind of professional profile, and treat it as a business as it is not a hobby.

“More importantly, however, I would encourage all young people to invest in their education and focus on whatever career they want to have. If you work hard enough, anything is possible. In respect of Formula One, I think it is important to remember that in Europe there are around 45,000 jobs associated with this industry and its suppliers. The industry needs talented young people in disciplines including engineering, computer science, electronics, software design, marketing, communications and hospitality. Like any international sports business, Formula One has many opportunities for young, talented people.”

Mark Gallagher will be in Kuala Lumpur on April 9. He will be speaking at the Business of Innovation forum organised by The London Speaker Bureau. For more information visit www.bizofinnovation.com.my or call 03-210 10988.

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The heart of strategic influencing is to change someone’s perception instead of mere compliance. It’s about getting others to follow because they want to and not because they have to. It’s about that someone not feeling willing or out of obligation?

Absolutely! When people believe that they are merely complying (for instance, as their leader’s wishes), the quality of work is often at best, mediocrity. They will never give the extra mile, for to them, it is an official card. They need to know that you are genuinely concerned for others and you’re working with a sense of mission that would inspire them to follow willingly. Their hearts must be open to you. Their trust must be established, influence is the fruit you will reap.

On Sept 18, 1978, in Jonestown, Guyana, 911 followers of the People’s Temple, led by cult-leader Rev Jim Jones, died by cyanide poisoning in what is called the largest mass murder-suicide in history. In 1955 in San Jose, California, the People’s Temple started in Indianapolis, Indiana, as a racially integrated church that focused on helping people in need. At a time when most churches were segregated between the white and black, the People’s Temple offered a very different view of what social responsibilities were.

The leader of the cult, Jones, was a charismatic man who demanded—and received—total loyalty. He used the Bible as a weapon to control his followers, and Jones convinced them that American capitalism caused an unfair redistribution of society’s wealth. He hid the true story, and the poor and hard working had to receive the $90,000.

Amid growing pressure from the public, the media and the authorities, especially the FBI who were investigating reports of sexual abuse and human rights violations, Jones decided to move the People’s Temple to Guyana in South America in 1977. Named after himself, Jonestown’s population was just under 1,300 people at its peak in 1978. Maris quickly became embittered with power. He required his followers to call him “Father.” Later, Jones began to describe himself as “Christ” and then, in the last few years, claimed that he was himself, God.

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On Sept 18, 1978, in Jonestown, Guyana, 911 followers of the People’s Temple, led by cult-leader Rev Jim Jones, died by cyanide poisoning in what is called the largest mass murder-suicide in history. In 1955 in San Jose, California, the People’s Temple started in Indianapolis, Indiana, as a racially integrated church that focused on helping people in need. At a time when most churches were segregated between the white and black, the People’s Temple offered a very different view of what social responsibilities were.

The leader of the cult, Jones, was a charismatic man who demanded—and received—total loyalty. He used the Bible as a weapon to control his followers, and Jones convinced them that American capitalism caused an unfair redistribution of society’s wealth. He hid the true story, and the poor and hard working had to receive the $90,000.

Amid growing pressure from the public, the media and the authorities, especially the FBI who were investigating reports of sexual abuse and human rights violations, Jones decided to move the People’s Temple to Guyana in South America in 1977. Named after himself, Jonestown’s population was just under 1,300 people at its peak in 1978. Maris quickly became embittered with power. He required his followers to call him “Father.” Later, Jones began to describe himself as “Christ” and then, in the last few years, claimed that he was himself, God.

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PRINCIPLES OF INFLUENCING

By EVA CHRISTODOULOU
eva.christodoulou@leaderonomics.com

INFLUENCING others is a skill that is crucial in all aspects of one’s life. Especially when we are talking about the work environment, and even more, when one holds a position of leadership requiring to influence those in the team, or even potential clients and partners.

There is much research done on the topic. How people react to information given to them really depends on the way the information is communicated to them. It is therefore important to understand the range of influencing styles available, how to adopt all of them, and with some experience, be able to suss out an individual or a group and decide which is the style best suited to achieve the biggest influence possible. It is common to see an individual defaulting back to his/her most comfortable style of influence—a practice that does not allow him/her to influence people as much as using the right tactic for the occasion and individual/team to be influenced.

A study conducted by Cecilia Falke and Gary Yukl on the techniques that managers in businesses use to influence their staff found that the most effective influencing tactics seem to be inspirational appeals and consultation. The least effective ones were found to be pressure, legitimating and coalition tactics. Intermediate in effectiveness were rational persuasion, ingratiating personal appeals and exchange tactics. Overall, “soft” tactics seem to be more effective than the harder ones. Here are a few influencing styles that people use:

INSPIRATIONAL

By adopting this influencing style, a person attempts to encourage others to follow their advice or demands by communicating a sense of shared mission, and perhaps an exciting possibility that may emerge. It is common to use stories, metaphors and inspirational appeals in order to build a shared sense of vision and mission.

RATIONALISATION

Hard facts, statistics, past experiences and logic are used to back up an idea. The reasoning behind this is to push individuals towards making a rational choice, based on past experience and evidence that indicates the high possibility of history repeating itself.

ASSERTIVENESS

Perhaps the least favourite one, assertiveness is used to focus on rank, rules and authority in order to ensure people comply with instructions.

NEGOTIATION

This style of influencing, time consuming as it may turn out to be, entails compromises and concessions in order to reach a result. Trade-offs are required, and much time can be lost.

BRIDGING

When using this style, a person is attempting to influence by uniting and connecting with others. Much reliance is placed on reciprocity, consultation, personal relationships, building coalitions and engaging superior support.

Gaining awareness about influencing styles is crucial as we may be using a certain style and be struggling to exert influence. Consciously knowing our influencing style, and what other people respond to best, would help us increase our influencing power significantly.

CIALDINI’S SIX PRINCIPLES OF INFLUENCE

Psychology professor Robert Cialdini identified six principles of influence through many experimental studies and after observing many salespeople, fundraisers, recruiters, marketers, and advertisers. He identified these six methods used as, what he also called, “weapons” of influence.

1. RECIPROCITY

The idea of reciprocity is based on the tendency of humans to return favours, and treat others the way they treat them. An obliging individual will easily offer concessions, discounts, or return any favours. So, if a colleague helps you at a time you are busy at work, you are likely to return the favour when your colleague requires your help. To use reciprocity to influence others, you need to realise the potential gain for both sides—if your colleague helps you, what can she get in return?

2. COMMITMENT AND CONSISTENCY

The desire to be seen as consistent pushes people into doing something for someone else. If, for example, you supported your colleague’s project idea at the initial stages of discussion, you are more likely to go on supporting your colleague and helping out with the project if need be. To influence the people around you in this way, you would need to talk to them from the outset about your ideas, listen to their comments, and get their support early on.

3. SOCIAL PROOF

People tend to be more easily convinced of an idea if many more are also subscribing to it. The assumption is, if many people do something, then it must be OK to do so ourselves. Especially when one is uncertain on whether or not to undertake a task or to embrace an idea, social proof by people in similar circumstances can be very persuasive and might allow the individual to accept the task/idea. This influencing principle can be used by creating a buzz on a task and try to get key individuals—not necessarily managers—to embrace it and many more will follow. Or, highlight the statistics behind it—for example, how many times it’s been implemented in the past and what the success rates were.

4. LIKING

Liking is a crucial factor when it comes to influencing others—so be sure to be a person liked by the majority! Likability arises from friendly behaviour, but also common and familiar background.

Companiesthat use sales agents from within a community employ this principle with much success. People are more likely to buy, or to listen, to people like themselves. To ensure you use this influencing principle, make sure you put time and effort in your relationships with the people around you. Building trust and rapport is essential, whether it is with clients, or your colleagues.

5. AUTHORITY

A position of authority always makes those associated to us feel a sense of duty and obligation. That position can be a result of experience, or a job title. When using your own authority, you need to be careful not to use it negatively. Other figures of authority, however, can also be mentioned to validate your ideas. In addition to that, things like well-produced brochures, professional presentations, impressive office premises and smart clothing can also lend authority. This principle may be more suited to use outside your organisation rather than on your colleagues.

Leadership, however, can be used to gain support for your ideas.

6. SCARCITY

Limited availability of something makes it all the more attractive. If someone is told that a product is on offer and it will soon become unavailable, or available at a much higher price, chances are, a sale will be made. Even though influencing at the beginning, it is easy to lose credibility if a long time passes and such a product is still available at the same terms.

THE AMAZING DISCOVERY OF MIRROR NEURONS

By TERRY SMALL
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If you stick your tongue out at a newborn, the newborn will do the same. Why is that? The answer... mirror neurons! The existence of mirror neurons in your brain is one of the greatest, most recent discoveries of neuroscience. These amazing cells are scattered throughout your brain. Mirror neurons fire when you move. They also fire when you see someone else move. Even when you hear someone move, the implications are huge! Mirror neurons allow us to copy movement, feel for another person, and get wrapped up in watching a sports event or a play. These brain cells are deeply involved in the way we learn about the world. Neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese states, “We share with others not only the way they normally act or subjectively experience emotions and sensations but also the neural circuits enabling those actions, emotions, and sensations; the mirror neuron systems.”

Want to see evidence of mirror neurons in action? Let out a big yawn the next time you are with a group of people. Watch to see what happens! Now think about the whole dynamic of social interaction! My friend, George Kohlrieser, sent me a great video clip on mirror neurons. It is remarkable! http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sciencenow/video/3204/ q12-220.html

You can develop your mirror neurons by very carefully observing how someone executes movement. Your mirror neurons will fire just as if you did the movement! You can practise these movements in your head. You develop your imagination. Your brain becomes better at interacting with the world. Reflect on that. In the next Brain Bulletin I will tell you how to keep your brain alive. REMEMBER: “You are a genius!”

Terry Small is a brain expert who resides in Canada and believes that anyone can learn how to learn easier, better, faster, and that learning to learn is the most important skill a person can acquire. To interact with Terry, email mystarjob@leaderonomics.com
KISS, HUG OR SHAKE HANDS?

By WENDY LEE
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ANY years ago, I met this Chinese Australian who sat in one of my training sessions. Just before we parted ways, he leaned over to supposedly give me a peck on the cheek, kind of a “thank you” gesture. Without a thought, I turned my face away from him, as I thought he wanted to whisper something to me. There was an awkward silence, as his face was hanging in midair! And then he chuckled and said, “See, a natural body language in action.”

There was another time when the company I was working with, hosted an international event. When I saw my guests walking in, very excitedly, I extended my hand even when I was still a distance away and dashed to their direction. To my horror, the first person whom I reached out to, a middle-aged Muslim man, took a step back and declined my handshake. I was left standing there, with an out-stretched hand, in front of all the other guests.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Living in a multi-cultural country, many of us would have encountered some of these “interesting” moments. So, what’s the proper etiquette? To kiss, hug or shake hands?

Let’s look at some of the art of greetings – practised by many, yet still feared by some.

THE “AIR-KISS” OR “MWAAH-MWAH” (OR SOME TIMES ALSO KNOWN AS CHEEK KISS)

The air kiss – a pretense of kissing with the lips pursed, but only touching cheek-to-cheek, is a gesture of greeting or farewell at formal events such as weddings, anniversaries, etc. But we do see them quite often at less formal occasions as well, like family get-togethers and casual outings with friends.

As part of business and social etiquette, we do need to master the art of “mwah-mwah”. The question is, how do you do it with style and when is it appropriate to air-kiss?

One of the easiest ways for us to decide whether it is appropriate to practise the art of “mwah-mwah”, is to observe the body language and the greetings of others. If everyone else is mwah-mwah-ing away, then it is expected that you too, are to generally air-kiss everyone as well. But if no one else is doing it, especially during serious business meetings, then it is certainly not the right place to show your affections even if the person was your long lost friend.

And the proper way to air-kiss? Easy. Just as you are approaching the other party, reach out your hands. If they seem relaxed, and they too reach out both hands and look as if they are ready for a bear hug, then an air-kiss is just a second away. Lean in and aim for your cheek to gently touch his or her right cheek, while making a soft “mwah” sound. And depending on culture, you may choose to repeat one time on another cheek, or you can air-kiss three times as my Muslim friends practise with me.

But what happens if you are not comfortable with that kind of close proximity? My advice: Stand a few feet away, and when that person makes his or her way towards you, look them in the eye, give a gentle smile (and not a giddy grin) and extend your hand as if you are getting ready for a handshake. This should keep them at arm’s length as you proceed to shake their hands in a business-like manner.

AND WITH AIR-KISS, COMES ALSO THE QUESTION OF HUGGING – YEA OR NAY?

A hug is a tiny word that can mean a lot. It’s a show of affectation, a way to comfort, and a means of celebration. We hug our family members, good friends, loved ones all the time. But with our working environment getting a lot more relaxed and cozier nowadays, can we extend our hugs to colleagues, bosses, business associates, clients, customers?

Here’s the rule of engagement – if the occasion calls for a celebration, then a pat on the back or a quick congratulatory hug, is acceptable. An office is still a place for conducting business. So, no matter how casual your office settings can be, there should be a respectful distance between colleagues.

And if you really think about it, to hug or not to hug is also a matter of personal preference. While some people love to be hugged, others are the “please don’t touch me” types. So, remember to always look at body language to gauge how open the other person is when it comes to bodily contact. If you are unsure, then keep thy hands to thyself.

TO SHAKE OR NOT TO SHAKE?

There are many stories related to the origins of a handshake. But a more practical one is that the handshake comes from medieval Europe, where kings and knights would extend and grasp each other’s hands as a demonstration that each did not possess concealed weapons. Even the shake of the hands is thought to dislodge any sharp objects that may have been hidden in the sleeves.

Handshaking is perhaps the most widely recognised of greetings worldwide, in both Western and non-Western societies. Generally, handshakes are expected in these situations:

1. You walk into a business meeting.
2. You meet someone for the first time.
3. You run into someone you know.
4. You congratulate someone.
5. You are introduced to another person.

Handshakes are not expected when:

1. The other person is eating with his right hand.
2. A person has his hands full and can’t offer his hand.
3. The person you meet is higher ranking and doesn’t offer his hand.
4. The other person’s hands are wet.

Cultural norms dictate that a person of a higher standing, in age or in rank, should initiate a handshake. If both are equal, the person that offers the handshake first will be perceived as the person with more confidence. So, when someone extends his or her hand to you, reciprocate with a confident, web-to-web touching, full palm grip if you want to project an image of poise and professionalism. Anything that is weak or soft indicates that you are a timid person who lacks self-esteem. Anything that is too strong may result in the other person resenting you for hurting their hands.

But what happens if, for either religious or medical reasons (swollen palms, arthritis), you do not wish to shake hands with the other person - how do you say NO, without offending the other person? In situations like these, you may try the following:

1. Stand further away than an arm’s length, and place your hands behind. Nod slightly to acknowledge his presence.
2. When an introduction is made, quickly put your right arm diagonally across your chest, and nod or bow slightly. This should be a clear indication that you do not wish to shake hands.
3. Lastly, if you have forgotten to do one and two above, just raise both your hands slightly as a sign to decline politely.

If the situation is reversed and you are the one that is caught off-guard with your hands hanging in mid-air? Feel not. Just casually use your left hand, to gently keep back your right hand. And remember to always smile and maintain your composure. If you don’t make it a big deal, no one else will.

— Wendy Lee is president of MABIC (Malaysian Assoc. of Brand & Image Consultants) and director at Brandimage International Institute. She is a firm believer that with Style...there must be Substance!

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myStarjob.com, Saturday 16 February 2013
By DIVYA CHANDY
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The story follows the life of Simba, a lion cub, equivalent of an average village child, to the entire ecosystem they lived in life as demonstrated by Timon and Pumbaa. There is also no denying on the significance of the element of friendship.

authority, but allowed Simba to see parts of his struggles and fears whenever he felt it was needed to develop the learning process for his mentee. Mufasa took great interest in the learning progression of his son, allowing him some amount of freedom to make his own choices, and therefore mistakes. These lessons imparted stayed on with Simba. Although things made a turn for the worse when he was burdened with the guilt of causing his father’s death and repressed from his leadership role, deep down Simba knew what it took to be King. After finally being healed from the shackles of guilt that held him back, all of the things Mufasa taught him came into memory as he went on to take his throne. He also worked to maintain status quo in his position of power by working within the parameters of his domain. This is seen in the story when Scar refused to relocate the Pride when they ran out of food and water, causing the Pride to go hungry. At this point, his course of action was to turn them away from his authority over them.

In the case of Simba who was a threat to his position, Scar schemed to eradicate any obstacles that stood in his process of achieving his goal. His leadership style was responsive, unlike his brother’s who was proactive. His game was to ensure that his subordinates achieve objectives outlined for them through rewards and penalties set by him.

SCAR THE TRANSACTIONAL LEADER

Scar was the complete opposite of his brother Mufasa as he displayed the traits of a transactional leader. He gained his power as the leader of the hyenas by providing them with benefits, like food and protection, as well as invoking fear. It was a “transaction.” His end goal was to achieve and maintain a position of absolute power. To achieve this goal, he worked to employ and influence Simba and the hyenas by providing them with treats and “surprises” to not only maintain their loyalty to him, but to ensure that they played their part in his plan for success. Failure to do so resulted in some forms of punishment for the hyenas, although not strong enough to turn them away from his authority over them.

Just as in life as demonstrated by Timon and Pumbaa, as leaders, it is important to take note of the fact that they not only rescued him, they also provided Simba with what he needed to keep a look out for them. If we have, make effort to spend time with them and learn. Starting young also means being able to take charge of your leadership journey regardless of your age or circumstances. To take this one notch higher, who are our Simbas? Is there someone around us who clearly needs guidance or has a lack of competence? What role can we play in their lives?

What role can we play in their lives? We need to work to invest time in the lives of the less experienced, especially those who are in their youth.

Not only will it secure our future as the youth are our future leaders, they have so much to teach us if we return if we are willing. My boss, Roshan Thiran, once said this: “It may take a village to raise a child, it takes a community to raise a leader.”

DIVYA CHANDY is a part of the Youth Division of Leaderonomics that is passionate about inspiring youths towards leadership excellence. She is actively involved with DropZone, an alternative youth hang out spot in Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya that serves the youth of the area. If you are interested in developing young leaders, you can email her at divya.chandy@leaderonomics.com or check out DropZone at www.facebook.com/dropzonemyouth and show your support by hitting the “Like” button.
BEING ALL A WOMAN CAN BE

By JERMAINE BEE
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The age-old perception that women are only suitable to become housewives is a myth long gone. Women now play an active role in what is previously perceived as a man’s domain.

With women having greater career aspirations, their participation in the workforce is getting more and more evident. According to a survey conducted on women in the workplace by Booz and Co, one billion women are expected to enter the workplace in the next decade.

Women are being taken seriously as customers, as well as registered nurses. According to the World Bank, women are more inclined to be employed in lower-status and lower-paying jobs.

The two genders tend to have different sets of jobs in different types of industries due to bias based on stereotypes, social differences as well as biological differences. Women are more inclined to be employed in a lower-status and lower-paying job. A report by the Bureau of Labour Statistics in 2010 highlighted this issue.

It reported that women were mostly employed in occupations such as customer service representatives, secretaries and administrative assistants, as well as registered nurses. Also, according to the CNN in October 2012, women made up less than 12% of working physicists, engineers as well as those in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics or STEM field in the United States.

However, women are slowly making progress. According to Fortune, 23 out of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women. They included Meg Whitman of Hewlett-Packard, Ginni Rometty of IBM and Marissa Mayer of Yahoo.

Women are getting acknowledged in industries like technology that have traditionally reserved for the men.

SUPERIORITY ISSUE

Women needed to fight for gender equality because men had always been perceived as being superior. Things have changed as women have learned to speak up for themselves. They have more opportunities in education now.

According to the 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development, the lifestyle of women around the world has improved dramatically but there are still identifiable gaps.

There is a need to eliminate gender disadvantage in education so that men and women can have equal access to economic opportunities. However, certain quarters still believe that in a society, men should be the breadwinners while women should be confined to unpaid domestic chores.

Are men more superior compared with women?

I will not attempt to answer that question in this article. Instead, I believe that each person, female or male, can contribute to an organisation or company in his or her own unique way.

There are many talented women that do not fulfill their potential because they believe that their role is to become a homemaker or they feel guilty about having a career. In this era, women do not need to try so hard to fight for equality but they should instead speak up for themselves about what they want to do according to their capabilities.

Gender superiority is not an issue as men and women are wired differently.

My personal take is that mutual respect and understanding will ensure that we get the best out of women in the workplace.

We should focus on how to get the best out of every woman and man in our organisations and leverage on the strengths of every individual.

So, in conclusion, what’s a woman’s profession? It is anything that she aspires to be!

NURTURING THE HOPE OF OUR FUTURE

At Leaderonomics, we believe that it takes a village to raise a child and a community to build a leader. Our hope is to continuously build platforms that inspire and empower our young people towards becoming better leaders. Some of the initiatives we have launched include:

DIODE Youth Camp

DIODE Youth Camps are conducted during the public school holidays. Our campers learn to break out of their comfort zones, pick up new skills and to learn from positive role models to grow their leadership potential.

DIODE Youth Club

Our vision for our Youth Clubs is to bring weekly, intentional leadership interaction and learning into every school. We are currently running these clubs in 5 schools around Klang Valley.

DIODE Inspiration Centre

DropZone is our youth centre located in PJ Old Town and is open on weekdays to secondary school youth, who come by for our activities, workshops and even just to hang out.

For more information or to get involved in our youth services and initiatives, email us at youth@leaderonomics.com, call 03-79575809 or log on to www.leaderonomics.com
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**DEAR CAREERNOMERS,**

I am a final year university student. With graduation approaching, I am facing a dilemma – should I be applying to big corporations for my first job as a fresh graduate or should I be looking for a smaller company? It is often said that bigger organisations can offer you more structure, but surely working with a smaller company can allow you to perform various roles and be directly involved in all areas of the business. What would you recommend? I am sure many fresh graduates face this dilemma. Thank you.

**Thank you**

**Daniel**

**QUESTION**

We have four experts on career management, HR and office issues who will address your questions weekly. We refer to them as Careernomers – experts in career matters who will help you in your career journey. So if you have any burning question to ask, send it to dearcareernomers@leaderonomics.com and we will get the panel to answer your questions.

This week, Elisa Dass Avin, senior talent assessment consultant at Leaderonomics, and Johan Merican, CEO of TalentCorp, answer Daniel’s question.

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**DEAR DANIEL,**

I must first congratulate you on asking the right question, in that you clearly appreciate the importance of exposure and development in getting your career off to a good start. One should view at least the first three to five years as an extension of learning. Can best help you achieve your longer-term career aspirations.

To answer your question on whether to join a big corporation or smaller company, well it depends on you – your style of learning and your ambitions.

It is true that a bigger company tends to have a more structured development programme for its fresh graduate employees. I personally wanted such structure, so I started my career with a Big Four accounting firm. However, others may not like structure and thrive without a structured development programme. In which case, a smaller organisation which is more flexible and enables one to dabble in different aspects of the business may be better. What is your personal inclination?

I should qualify that size is a generalisation. Large organisations, including Google, are known for their flexibility and at the same time, there are owner-led SMEs which have strict demarcation of duties.

Your longer-term ambitions also have a bearing on your employer choice. For example, if you have entrepreneurial ambitions, it is important to ensure you get a rounded exposure to as many facets of a business. However, if you intend to climb the corporate ladder, the structure of a large organisation may serve you better. By and large, it is often easier to move from a large organisation to a smaller one than from a relatively unknown organisation to a larger company.

Beyond size, there are clearly organisations which by reputation enhance your CV going forward, by virtue of being known to attract and nurture top talent. Hence, one way to hedge your bets is to apply for a reputable organisation with a management trainee programme (there are a few organisations which have such programmes where there is a rotation every six months or a year, say over a three-year cycle). In this way, you can benefit from both structure and diversity of exposure.

Finally, whether large or small employer, I would advise you to look for an organisation which will provide you international exposure. In an increasingly globalised world, one should be exposed early on to international benchmarks towards framing your professional standards and to know what it takes to succeed.

I wish you all the best in your career.

Best regards,

**JOHAN MERICAN**

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**DEAR DANIEL,**

This is a common post-graduation question. While you are correct to point out the benefits of both type of organisations, the decision goes beyond just looking at the size of the company.

Firstly, you should have some understanding of the role that you will be taking on. If being successful in this role in the coming years requires you to have a good general knowledge before you specialise, like IT, then the opportunity to be exposed to the entire IT works in your first job will best benefit you. To best understand what you need to know in your job, talk to people who are in the industry. Following that, in your interviews, be specific in asking what kind of exposure you will be provided in the company.

Secondly, what are your career goals? Would you like to be a specialist or generalist in the area? Once again, this is also dependent on the role you take on. If you’re interested in global exposure, then look for a company that provides you with that.

Thirdly, what kind of corporate culture would you like? Some of us thrive in a structured environment, while others prefer a more casual work place. That said, I believe that there are great benefits to have a good foundation in a structured and professional environment (which can exist in large or medium-sized companies) as your first job. Learning the ropes on how to communicate and work professionally with internal and external stakeholders will set you apart from your peers in the coming years.

To summarise, I would say that a good first job experience should provide you the opportunity for the following:

- An in-depth learning of the area of your job scope.
- The best practice of your work – the process, the approach, the network.
- Professional ways to conduct meetings, presentations, communicate and liaise with others.
- Opportunities to think outside the box and challenge yourself.
- A good mentor/boss who is willing to guide you in your work.
- And since this is your first job, don’t be afraid to put in the extra hours/days, go beyond your job scope, make mistakes (that’s your best way to learn), be reprimanded for mistakes, and more importantly try new things!

If you land yourself in such job, it may not feel like a bed of roses, but it is definitely a good platform to fast track your learning as you enter this new corporate journey.

My final advice, don’t take on a job that sounds easy. If you’re too comfortable in your job, then learning has stopped. All the best!

**ELISA DASS AVIN**

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All the best!

HI DANIEL,

Would you like to be a specialist or generalist in the area? Once again, this is also dependent on the role you take on. If you’re interested in global exposure, then look for a company that provides you with that.

Thirdly, what kind of corporate culture would you like? Some of us thrive in a structured environment, while others prefer a more casual work place. That said, I believe that there are great benefits to have a good foundation in a structured and professional environment (which can exist in large or medium-sized companies) as your first job. Learning the ropes on how to communicate and work professionally with internal and external stakeholders will set you apart from your peers in the coming years.

To summarise, I would say that a good first job experience should provide you the opportunity for the following:

- An in-depth learning of the area of your job scope.
- The best practice of your work – the process, the approach, the network.
- Professional ways to conduct meetings, presentations, communicate and liaise with others.
- Opportunities to think outside the box and challenge yourself.
- A good mentor/boss who is willing to guide you in your work.
- And since this is your first job, don’t be afraid to put in the extra hours/days, go beyond your job scope, make mistakes (that’s your best way to learn), be reprimanded for mistakes, and more importantly try new things!

If you land yourself in such job, it may not feel like a bed of roses, but it is definitely a good platform to fast track your learning as you enter this new corporate journey.

My final advice, don’t take on a job that sounds easy. If you’re too comfortable in your job, then learning has stopped. All the best!
Coming up in next Saturday’s issue . . .

INTROVERT OR EXTROVERT?

Also next week:

Joseph Tan writes on loyalty and mobility.

The dynamic GMD of RHB Banking Group speaks on his first ever job and the experience gained.

Find out why young talents leave an organisation in next week’s Top 10.

Find out how self awareness shapes a leader, in Be a Leader.