Manage conflict wisely
In a family business, tackling conflicts smartly is essential to maintain harmony.

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A LANGUAGE THERAPIST determined to educate dyslexic children

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MUNDANE TASKS can be made interesting by following these simple steps

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USE SOCIAL MEDIA as a platform to secure a job

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THE POWER OF BEING PROACTIVE AND ACTION-ORIENTED

Right after getting my SPM exam results, I applied for various scholarships offered by the Government and a number of local organisations. In spite of having great results, I did not receive a single scholarship offer to further my studies. One day, one of my friends, most of whom had poorer results compared with mine, received scholarships to various foreign universities. I was extremely frustrated.

Part of my problem was that I was a hopeless interviewee. I tended to “tell the truth” during the interviews and that was apparently not what interviewers wanted to hear—especially on my fine act of balancing “changing the world”, sports and studies. I went to Form Six and was so envious of all my other friends who were flying off to further their studies or being prepared to leave for foreign universities.

My frustration soon turned into resolve to change the situation. I decided to be proactive and somehow figure out a way to join my friends and get out of Malaysia. And so I worked tirelessly day and night to get university application forms, doing up my “resume” and writing passionate letters to various universities about why they needed to enrol me and pay for my education, food and lodging. I think I possibly sent letters to more than 1,000 universities all over the world.

Surprisingly, I got answers from many of the big universities—Harvard, Princeton and Georgetown invited me to enrol but only offered paltry scholarships. So, I kept tirelessly applying to other universities. Finally, a university in Connecticut sent me a letter to accept me with a full scholarship covering everything from food, lodging, tuition and the works. All I had to do was fly there.

And before long, I was off to the United States to further my education. On the flight over, I realised that because of my proactivity and bias for action, I now had a full scholarship and an opportunity to study in the United States. I resolved that whenever I was confronted with bleak and frustrating situations, I would not lament and moan, but rather figure out how to be proactive and action-oriented.

This bias for action and proactivity has helped me significantly in my career. By never wanting to sit idle and moan, I have managed to resolve numerous issues that may have stalled my career. In fact, being proactive rather than reactive has enabled me to be regarded as a “star” in many of the jobs I have held.

The first step in Stephen Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Effective People is to be proactive. According to Covey, “being proactive” is about taking responsibility for your life. You can’t keep blaming everything on others. Proactive people recognise that they are “responsible”. They don’t blame genetics, circumstances or people for their behaviour. They know they choose their behaviour.

Proactive people blame external sources for their behaviour. A proactive person even uses proactive language—I can, I will, I believe, etc. A reactive person uses reactive language—I can’t, I have to, if only! Proactive people focus their time and energy on things they can control. So, the big question is—Are you a proactive and an action-oriented person?

This week, we journey into the world of being proactive and action-oriented. Andrew Lau, who heads up our university division at Leaderonomics, explores proactivity and its importance for your career.

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 online at www.leaderonomics.com or at our main home site www.leaderonomics.com.

We wish you all the best in your career journey! 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. Have a wonderful week ahead and don’t forget to be proactive and action-oriented.

Warm regards,
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Dyslexic children who are yet to be diagnosed are often misunderstood. They are perceived to be lazy and stupid although this is not the case at all. They are actually intelligent children with a creative streak in them. Most parents are in denial that their child has a disability and brush it off as the child being lazy. It is really sad,” says Rachel Cheah, a language therapist for dyslexic children and co-owner of LIFE Enrichment Centre, a centre that caters to these special children.

Dyslexia is a learning disability that impairs a person’s fluency or comprehension, and/or rapid naming. It is more of a philosophy rather than a system. Orton-Gillingham teaching is diagnostic-prescriptive in nature and has an efficient formulated set of teaching principles and practices for dyslexic children.

Cheah’s centre has five children and another is about to start. Her day at work begins at about noon when she gets the centre ready, reviews her previous lesson and prepares her lesson plan for the day before the arrival of her student. She teaches basic English that comprises phonics, spelling, reading, speaking, and writing. She plans each lesson depending on her student’s ability.

“Lessons start once my student arrives. It is usually one-on-one as dyslexic children cannot be taught in groups. They need full attention. My lessons are inclusive of building rapport with my students, engaging them in conversations and asking them questions. I use a deck of phonics cards during my lessons. I also get them to review letters, sounds and words. Besides that, they are introduced to new letters and words for the day. You have to keep repeating yourself several times, in order for them to gauge the lesson. These are the methods used to teach these children. However, classes with each child last for only one to one and a half hours as their attention span is very short. I also incorporate half an hour of nursery rhymes, singing, dancing, puzzles, board games and story reading to enhance their vocabulary.”

According to Cheah, the children have to be treated with care. A lot of patience and perseverance is needed. One has to have the passion and desire to see them succeed in life. Sometimes, the child can be having a bad day thus not much can be accomplished on that day. Only half of what is planned gets to be taught as the child is having a bit of tantrum and needs to be dealt with delicately.

Cheah’s day ends at about 5pm. She has two other colleagues teaching in her centre as well. Besides educating dyslexic children, Cheah and her colleagues also hold talks on dyslexia in the centre as well as in kindergartens and private schools.

“We give talks in kindergartens to create awareness among teachers and to enable them to identify children with this disability. You see, if detected early and given remedial treatment, these children have the potential to have a normal lifestyle. They have a normal IQ and intellect, their only disadvantage being their inability to read and write, which sadly is perceived to be a lazy trait by teachers. This is what causes their self-esteem to plummet and provokes them to act out and have behavioural problems. Thus, through these talks, we hope to enlighten parents and teachers on their children’s plight.”

When asked about the challenges faced in her career, it came as a huge surprise when she says that it came from the parents and not the children. According to her, the obstacle she faces is the fact that the awareness of dyslexia is very low in the country and parents do not want to acknowledge that their child has this disability. They would rather brush it off and say that their child is lazy and stupid. They do not help the child in the initial stages and always wait until the situation gets worse. Besides that, the public do not know much about dyslexia and thus cannot recognise the symptoms.

“Dyslexic children are highly creative and think out-of-the-box. With proper guidance and care, they can be very bright and succeed in life. Look at some of the famous and successful personalities such as Sir Richard Branson, Tom Cruise and Albert Einstein. These people were dyslexic. Did they not make it in life? In my mind, an educator plays a crucial part in a child’s life. I love what I am doing as I bring about positive changes in these children’s lives. I see myself as an agent of change who can help these kids to lead a normal life. It’s fulfilling to see a dyslexic child progress and overcome his/her obstacles after proper and good remedial nurturing. However, one must remember that it takes a lot of patience to achieve this.”

For all those wanting to educate dyslexic children, Cheah advises them to get educated on dyslexia first. She feels that Malaysians have little knowledge on dyslexia. Most people are not aware of this ordeal. When you have knowledge on dyslexia, only then will you know how to handle a dyslexic child as these children need proper and loving care.

Cheah aims to expand her centre and spread awareness on dyslexia by holding more talks on this disorder. She would like to groom more educators for these special children and provide help for more dyslexic children at an early stage.
A Leader Overcomes

At 19 months, Helen Keller suffered “an acute congestion of the stomach and brain” which left her deaf and blind. Despite this handicap, drawing inspiration from her teacher Anne Sullivan, Helen overcame being deaf and blind to become a great leader and an inspiration to millions.

Winston Churchill, Jack Welch and Sir Isaac Newton overcame their speech impediment and stuttering. Thomas Edison, Leonardo da Vinci and Richard Branson all suffered from dyslexia, but they overcame great odds to achieve their vision of a better tomorrow.

Leaders are not born. Everyone has the potential deep inside to overcome adversities and be great.

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Managing Conflict While Maintaining the Family Bond

By GEORGE KOHLRIESER
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CONFLICT in family business comes with the territory. The underlying basis of the family is emotion with loyalty as its foremost principle. A family is expected to nurture and care for each other with membership being for life, regardless of performance. When the rules of business and the rules of family overlap, conflict is unavoidable. In my experience, it is the fear of conflict and its consequences that leads people to doing nothing about circumstances that are making them unhappy. Why rock the boat if you disagree with your brother, sister, mother or father? After all, the familial relationship is permanent.

When a person avoids conflict, the brain is working perfectly correctly as it is hardwired to avoid potential danger at the natural survival level. We have to learn to “rewire” our brain to step towards conflict instead of stepping back from it. Conflict occurs as a natural and inevitable result of human relationships and, therefore, is best seen as a challenge, a problem to be solved, an opportunity and, in real sense, something positive. Handled well, the differences that arise between people will lead to creative problem solving and successful human relationships. In family businesses, it is vital to create an environment where conflict is encouraged for the positive benefits it can bring.

Conflict is defined as “a difference between two or more persons characterized by tension, emotionality, disagreement and polarization where bonding is either being threatened or lost.” The negative effects of not confronting conflict include reluctance to exchange information, poor performance, stress, loss of self-esteem and destructive relationships. There have been cases where the succession of the family business has been threatened when a son falls out with the father over the strategic direction and subsequently chooses a different career. When mismanaged, conflict can lead to serious and costly consequences that can threaten the survival of the family business.

At the root of all conflict is broken bonding and loss. There are people with major differences and disagreements who are able to keep a bond and do not have such conflict. There are six steps to creating such a bond that enables conflict to be brought into the open and resolved in a constructive and healthy manner:

1. Separate the person from the problem: Issues cannot be resolved effectively if there is disrespect between the parties. It is important that people focus on the issue, not on the personalities or on the past. They can then use the problem to discover the other person’s thinking rather than as an occasion to win. The quality of the familial relationship can be protected by recognising and admitting to a growing problem while it is still small and for both parties to be willing to discuss it. Family members must either bring issues up in a non-threatening way as and when they occur or drop them altogether. By focusing on the problem, as opposed to the person, people can maintain respect for the individual and work together with common goals to find a resolution.

2. Master the Mind’s Eye: The Mind’s eye is physically located in the brain and controls the way people view themselves and the world. When people have a hard time with others, they are then able to focus clearly on what they want to achieve. If family members can visualise a successful outcome, they can then avoid some of the tension and polarisation that can be present in disagreements and help achieve a positive result. Family members need to pick issues thoughtfully and carefully, taking the time to clarify thoughts and feelings before reacting. On emotionally charged issues, there is a great value in rehearsing before actually making a statement. The mindset with which people approach conflict can radically alter the outcome. Therefore, by focusing on the positive, people are able to influence the outcome in that direction.

3. Manage dialogue with mutual respect: The words people use can make a significant difference to business performance. When stating a point of view, needs or feelings, people must watch the tone of voice and that of the person they are communicating with. In stressful situations, and by focusing on their own point of view, people can speak to each other in a series of monologues rather than a dialogue. Putting objections in a question form as often as possible is a powerful way of advancing the dialogue (What would you think if...? Have you considered the possibility...? Would it work if...? Always offer an alternative as a different way of thinking about the problem if an objection is raised. It is also important for the family members to avoid blocks to dialogue (i.e. passivity, sarcasm, discounting etc., particularly the use of the phrase “yes, but...”) so that they can engage in a true dialogue.

4. Look at options and proposals in family disagreements: It is important that the parties involved brainstorm together to create a variety of possible resolutions. Developing a number of options shifts the focus away from the entrenched positions of either party. Offering choices and compromising where it does not violate one’s own rights can help the other person save face. Through conversation and dialogue, it is possible for both parties to decide that they want the same thing.

5. Invoke the power of concession making: When a person makes a concession, no matter how small, it is important for the other party to recognise and reward it. This approach helps to minimise the negative and maximise the positive. Successful negotiations are often resolved through a series of small steps in which concession making and giving play a key role in moving the process forward. Concessions evoke the law of reciprocity: a person gives something to someone and that person feels obliged to give back in similar form. Unfortunately, many people see concessions as a sign of weakness as they view the negotiation as a win/lose scenario. However, making concessions set the stage for a win/win outcome for all. Indeed, the art of concession making is at the heart of all conflict resolution.

6. Maintain the relationship: Once a general resolution is attained, a foundation for a new agreement can be formed. Family members who create a formula for dialogue that maximises the potential for everyone concerned can then create a climate that encourages the repeated raising of issues in a constructive manner, framed in a dialogue of mutual respect. Once an agreement is reached, it is vital to communicate this to other family members or, as relevant, other senior managers. In a family business, maintaining a positive relationship is a vital part of any negotiation.

As preserving family harmony is a key goal in family businesses, successful conflict management becomes an invaluable skill. Unresolved conflict threatens both the business and the family. The goal is to build a company culture of conflict acceptance and management with an open and engaged approach. With each success comes an increased capacity to deal with difference positively. Ultimately, addressing conflict can become a proud challenge for the family unit and a source of competitive advantage for the family business.

George Kohlrieser is an expert in conflict management. He was a former hostage negotiator and is currently director of leadership at IMD in Switzerland. He spends a few months yearly in Malaysia and if you are keen to engage him to help your business in resolving conflicts, email people@leaderonomics.com
SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE NEVER SEE ANY TASK OR DECISION AS TRIVIAL. THEY REALISE EVERY DECISION IS A CHANCE TO DEVELOP ONE’S CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY.

USE IT TO IMPROVE YOURSELF
Successful people never see any task or decision as trivial. They realise every decision is a chance to develop one’s character and personality. Ask yourself who you want to be and then determine how you will do this “mundane” task. After all, a great character never surfaces overnight, it is developed day by day.

MAKE IT FUN
Most mundane tasks require little concentration so do it while listening to music or chatting with a friend. Perhaps you could even challenge yourself to finish it within a certain time frame and reward yourself later.

POETRY TO MAKE THE BEST OUT OF MUNDANE TASKS

LOOK OUT FOR OPPORTUNITIES
Opportunity does not come knocking on the door for some easily; it is hidden in many unassuming tasks. For example, the person whom you need to call might just turn out to help you secure your next big contract.

BE THE BEST THAT YOU CAN BE
You do not have to wait for a big break to show the world your capabilities. If you have to make a phone call, send out emails or type out minutes of the meeting, do your best! Your managers will definitely notice your outstanding performance which reflects your enthusiasm and capability.

IT IS ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE
What is mundane, really? When we categorise activities in our mind and label them as boring, it turns us off. However, if we look at it as an opportunity to better ourselves or help others, we realise their importance. For example, helping out to clean the office cupboard may be an opportunity to help our colleagues or get to know our colleagues better.

PREPARATION FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY
Realise that mundane tests of everyday life prepare us to face extraordinary challenges. Truly amazing people make the best out of ordinary situations. After all, practice makes perfect. Once you have perfected what you are doing, you can move on to the next level.

ONE AT A TIME
Avoid piling up mundane tasks until they require a substantial amount of time to get them done. Procrastination will not get the work done any faster. Completing mundane tasks as they come will make them more manageable.

LOOK AT THE BIGGER PICTURE
Very often, if we understand the purpose of our tasks collectively, they seem more important. For example, entering invoice numbers is mundane but once you understand the purpose of it in preparing the company accounts, it will become meaningful to you.

UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM
Filing papers is very boring but learning the system and knowing how you contribute can help you learn more about the company. By having the initiative to find out what goes on behind the scenes, you will learn quickly about the company’s processes.

TAKING IT EASY
Do something challenging first that is brain-wrecking. Then do a mundane task that requires minimal thinking; it can serve as a breather which you will be very grateful to have. The key is planning how to schedule your tasks so that the mundane activities serve as a break from hardcore work.

To view our top 10 videos, visit www.leaderonomics.tv/top10
BEING PROACTIVE AT WORK

By PREMA JAYABALAN
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All of us keep talking about changing our working style to become more action-oriented at work but how many of us actually take actions to implement it? It is easy to just sit and say that you want to be more proactive at work but it takes a whole lot of determination and diligence to put those words into action. What does it mean to be proactive at work?

A proactive person is one that is action-oriented and constantly looks and thinks ahead of what he/she can do to contribute to the organisation, and in so doing, further enhance his/her career. They are people who do not wait for opportunities to arise but rather, try to create opportunities for them to contact. This could be many arises, you will be the first person on their minds for them to contact. Whilst networking, take in activities that take place in your organisation. Participate in these activities and get yourself familiar with the resources available in the company which can be useful for you. Sometimes, certain companies even offer assistance in further education, should you require one. Also, seek advice on your goals. People with vast experience will be able to offer sound feedback on your goals and targets.

START NETWORKING

In order to be proactive, the first thing you must remember is not to be someone who is invisible in the office. Make yourself known to everyone. You can start off by networking with the people in your organisation. Participate in activities that take place in your organisation. Volunteer to be on committees for office events and CSR projects. Try to be known to people from all levels. Whilst networking, take your time and subtly speak about your plans for your career to potential people who will be able to assist you. When the opportunity arises, you will be the first person on their minds for them to contact. This could be many things, like a promotion, a better position in the organisation, and in so doing, further enhance his/her career.

LEVERAGE ON TRAINING

Your organisation is sure to offer many training and development programmes for employees. Grab this opportunity and attend these trainings on the topics and angles that are in line with your goals. You can also attend programmes on topics that interest you. You will be surprised at the amount of knowledge and opportunities that you will get by attending these trainings. Besides that, offer to be involved in the planning process and the execution of these programmes especially ones that can help you achieve your goals.

DO NOT PROCRASTINATE

A man who waits for opportunities to come knocking on his door remains waiting all through his life but a man who goes ahead and looks for opportunities and leverages them achieves success quickly in life. Decide on which man you want to be. In order to be proactive at work, do not procrastinate and keep putting things off for another day. This will get you nowhere at all. Execute every task as planned, without putting it off. Get things done there and then. Being someone who is always on the move and someone who is quick at accomplishing things will definitely get you noticed and rewarded.

TRAITS OF A PROACTIVE PERSON:

1. A SELF-REFLECTOR

A proactive person is someone who always reflects by asking himself/herself about the importance of each task that has to be executed. They are good at distinguishing between the ones that need immediate attention and the ones that can be handled later.

2. GOOD CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY

Someone who is proactive always thinks and examines critically about how he/she will attempt his tasks in an efficient manner. Prior to attempting a task, they always plan, and come up with a procedure and a routine on how to settle the assignment given. They gather all relevant information pertaining to the assignment and get themselves fully-equipped with all the needed information before working on the task.

3. PREVENTS PROBLEMS

A proactive person is one who always tries his/her best to prevent the possibility of a problem arising by thinking ahead. They try to tackle issues which are deemed to be possible failures in the future in advance to prevent them from becoming problems. They are good at taking precautions and having alternative plans.

4. A PROBLEM SOLVER

Proactive people have a mindset that always looks to find solutions for all problems. They are known not to ponder and dwell too long on a problem but are quick to come up with solutions on how to settle issues and crises. They are always looking ahead on how to overcome obstacles. They do not get thoroughly upset or pulled down by problems as they are people with high self-esteem and confidence.

5. STAYS AHEAD IN ALL MATTERS

Even if they are just a day-to-day tasks which are not so urgent, proactive people always stay ahead of such matters. By doing this, these matters will be solved when a sudden need for them arises. They can be handled immediately without unnecessary worries.
STRATEGISING YOUR CAREER THROUGH A PERSONAL VALUE CHAIN

As we walk through each of the Personal Value Chain activities, try to think of examples of how they relate to your own career development. The model is meant to be a structural guide for each one of us on how to proactively develop our own careers. The Personal Value Chain also exists across every level of an organisation. So don’t limit yourself to your own position or that of a senior vice-president eying the CEO position.

LEARNING INPUT
It is all too familiar in the modern working world to get swamped with tasks and deadlines and believe we know it all. It is at this point of another learning input in an activity, which asks us the important question of “how are we changing our own?” Learning input comes in the form of attending formal courses. Although learning can happen on the job, attending a formal course is a clear indicator of personal development when we have approval. It is much easier to explain that we have attended three courses than to try to recall the learning we had in the course of our work. Above all, if we consider that all professionals have natural instincts to find third parties that provide valuable insights and information.

OPERATIONS
Most of our time at work is typically spent conducting operational tasks. These range from doing things like daily tasks, checking and meeting forms a strategy towards career development. How many people telling you to work smart and not work hard? Ask any successful person and they will tell you that there is no shortcut, but through hard work. The better statement would be: work smart so that you know where to work hard. If you want to be really good at something, you have got to put in the hours. However, the key is that if you do work in the right routine to make sure you are meeting all the standard. Then the quality of work product can be differentiated from your peers. If you are just working long hours so that your bosses can notice you, chances are you will burnout soon enough and be looking for your next job.

PROJECT OUTPUT
In many organisations, there is typically a project team and an operational team. Projects are typically unique and are not repetitive in nature like operations. If we work in operations, we need to get projects under our belt. Operations typically provide learning for short periods of time. After a while we get good at doing the tasks and it becomes comfortable. A project constantly presents different pressures and challenges. It is where managers can plan and manage to give you projects on top of your daily responsibilities. Many times these are the tasks they want you to learn. And as you work in operations, you will once again get you an edge when you move up.

NETWORK
Just like marketing a product, we need to make sure that our networking is not just about networking. People need to know who we are and the contributions we bring to the organisation. This point is a lot of people tend to network with people who are just above them, the same level or one level above them. This creates a vicious cycle. If we are giving more up to the next role, we must already be visible to bosses that are at least three levels above us. Company social events are great places to build networks. So do not shy from these events and have the thinking that social life is not a waste of time. We should be looking at expanding our social events, as we are also able to talk to high-level bosses to connect with without appearing as though we are trying to shine their boots.

STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT
While networking is making sure more people know who we are, Stakeholder management is all about making sure we keep important people in our current network happy. Our stakeholders are usually our suppliers, peers, and boss. There are a few ways to keep stakeholders happy. Firstly is to keep them updated on what’s happening with our work. It’s always better to over communicate than under communicate once we understand what are the expectations. Secondly, ask for help when we are able to complete things by themselves. If we can do something without help, ask them if we can help. Besides, this also shows that we are team players – a trait that looks beautiful by bosses.

COST CONTROL
Nobody likes a person who spends a lot of the organisation’s money while contributing little value. It is half keeping a tight on our own spending of the company’s money shows we practice good cost control. Cost control is a key skill that’s needed if we intend to manage departments or projects. Spend on only what is required. Before we purchase something, always ask internally if someone already has the item we are looking for. If we are going to be spending on something, ask ourselves, what is the potential benefit that we will get from this? In terms, if we are going to purchase a high specification laptop, does this mean we get something extra? Just because we have attended both internally and externally. 3. Key tasks that we worked on which are not within our typical work scope. 4. Anything that we have done that brought value to the organisation - for example, monetary savings.

CREATE A FILE THAT STORES THINGS LIKE THESE:
Present these to the division’s manager or stakeholder praises us for a job well done.
2. Timeline of meetings that have attended both internally and externally.
3. Any key tasks that we worked on which are not within our typical work scope.
4. Anything that we have done that brought value to the organisation - for example, monetary savings.

Read all these out in a summary format during your appraisals with your boss at the end of the year. This will only help you to ensure that you are in a position to get promotions because you don’t know the big bosses well.

While its highly recommended to apply all the tips, you can start with a minimum of five activities. Best of all, you do not need any special skills or time to begin any of the new activities. It’s really simple to take charge of your career. So be the best time to start building your Personal Value Chain.

BY ANDREW LAI
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COMPANY RESOURCES
Most companies have lots of resources to help a person in charting their career path. Use them! Some examples are:
1. Look for a mentor from within the company to share his/her experience with you.
2. Ask HR for services like career counselling and also to gain insight to the divisions the company is moving in terms of people resources.
3. Join clubs and societies – it’s a great place to network and have fun.

The Personal Value Chain is powerful because the nine activities cover the three core components of any business management role: People, Processes and Technology. This ensures that any career development is not targeted. You don’t want to make sure you’ve developed functional skills only to get passed on for promotions because you don’t know the big bosses well.

While it’s highly recommended to apply all the tips, you can start with a minimum of five activities. Best of all, you do not need any special skills or time to begin any of the new activities. It’s really simple to take charge of your career. So be the best time to start building your Personal Value Chain now.

• Andrew Lai is head of Condensation Campus. The decisive supervisor in experimental leadership development for university students. For contact, contact him at andrew.lai@chartronics.com.
Recruiting software platform Jobvite recently published survey results noting that more than 22 million Americans used social networks to find jobs in 2011. Although there is limited data on RIL in Malaysia are turning to Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter for their search. What does this all mean?

Clearly, the job market has now shifted to the social platforms. Jobseekers are turning more and more of their search to land jobs. Even recruiting firms and head-hunters have shifted to the social media platform to find suitable candidates and hire the next rainmaker for their company.

The Jobvite Social Job Seeker Survey went on to publish that job seekers with more than 150 contacts on any single social network are considered “super social” and have a better chance of finding work, period. Jobseekers are now using more and more social media to get hired.

Here are five simple steps to take you closer to getting hired through the social network.

1. STRENGTHEN YOUR PROFILE
   Whilst Facebook and Twitter may be great to socialise, most recruiters these days prefer using LinkedIn or similar business type social platforms. Ensure that your profile is complete with your latest photo, e-mail and accomplishments. It wouldn’t hurt either to get recommendations from colleagues and friends. Study the profiles of industry professionals in the jobs you want and tailor your LinkedIn profile to what seems to be successful.

2. BE VISIBEL
   Think of your name as a brand. Make your presence felt on the internet. Sign up for established social networks and brand yourself properly. Create a compelling headline. Think of your headline as your Unique Selling Point or your very own tagline that can attract other people into “buying” you as a product. About.me is a new and simple way to link all your different social networks to a single page for which you can then attach its link to your e-mail signature.

3. BE ACTIVE AND PROACTIVE
   If you are using a business social network like LinkedIn, log on to your profile from time to time to see what is happening. Check to see who’s new on your contacts, browse other people’s, and join groups relevant to your niche. There’s nothing worse than someone who creates a profile and leaves it hanging. Being proactive means looking into your network and connections to see what opportunities can be reaped.

4. BE PROFESSIONAL
   If you are using Twitter, it’s a good to keep a professional public account. Keep your personal status updates, private. You are what you tweet. Keep in mind that everything you tweet tends to — or takes away from — your online persona. Try to ensure that your Twitter stream represents you as a professional individual that has unique thoughts to contribute. Your goal should be to become an industry expert — or at least tweet like one. The last thing you will need is to have your daily ramblings about your personal life available on the Twitter stream when recruiters look you up.

5. VISUME
   Moving away from the traditional resume, a Visume (video resume) is a trend that is slowly picking up among job seekers. Through a Visume, you may be able to represent yourself and your passion better. If you are planning to record a Visume, try your best to ensure that it is professional, clear and short. You would not want a Visume that is too long or even poorly recorded. Get some help if you are unable to make/edit it. Once it’s completed, don’t forget to post it on a video sharing site like YouTube/Vimeo and share the link all across your social accounts.

These are just some basic tips on getting hired through social media. A lot of successful social media job stories actually end with the punch line, “I was looking for a job”. In many cases, these lucky new hires just found interesting opportunities serendipitously. Believe me – recruiters are actively looking for talent over social media. Even here at my organisation, most of our hires are done through social media.

All said and done, the most successful job searches come from those who have already built up strong networks, both online and off. You need to integrate this new-approach with the traditional approach you’ve already been using, so there are no surprises from the recruiter’s perspective. They want the candidate they see on paper or online.

Happy job hunting!

By Gopi Ganesalingam
myStarjob.com for opportunities.

A NEWBIE’S REFERENCE DILEMMA

By Adrian Teeo
By Adriean Teeo
myStarjob.com for opportunities.

It is understandable that when it comes to listing names for job references, family members are not allowed. This is to avoid unrealistic claims about the applicant’s skills and their appropriateness for the job. For a greenhorn, “reference” usually conjures an image of someone older, someone you like and trust. Also, someone who can speak tonnes of good about you. But if you are a newbie in the job world, this task can be daunting – to some people.

“If you have only had one employer during your career, or you are a new graduate with no work experience, you can still have references. Although employers prefer employer references, they will understand if you have alternative references and an explanation,” says Laura Decarlo and Susan Guarneri in their book, Job Search Bloopers:

An interview with a colleague

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Some kids can be in their own lifechanging! Help out. “The most important thing in your brain. When you learn new challenges, and have new experiences your brain responds by growing new connections. You build a better brain! According to many studies you also learn something new everyday.

New friend. Call an old one. Volunteer for a new job. Be a coach. The list is endless!

Whether you are a student, parent, or otherwise, you may find some things of interest.

Helping kids of interest. Parents can make a huge difference in how well their children do at school, says Small. So, parents, listen up if you want to make a difference.

The founder of the Terry Small of water per 25 pounds of body mass per day.

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Peer pressure is mesmerising. Without us realising, we seek comfort in numbers. It may be getting punished in class or drinking, the more the merrier. Herd mentality is the reason why there are trending topics on Twitter or fashion trends. In followers, in some situations less obvious, every crowd, there will be a leader and direction – and that the other 95% follow.

Leeds University discovered that it takes a small amount of self-confidence in a person. The herd mentality is prevalent in our society whether we realise it or not. It is up to you as an individual whether you decide to stand up for what you believe in. It could be a human rights issue that you are passionate about or choosing a non-traditional career path. Leaders are proactive in any situation. They take it upon themselves to do something about the issue at hand. Being proactive and standing up requires confidence which radiates from leaders.

The herd mentality is against the consensus for not complying with the general consensus. Society encourages conformance. In school, students may be subject to punishment for not complying with the general consensus. Society encourages those who think along the same lines to keep their differing opinions to themselves. This is generally an Asian attitude, which is slowly shifting towards a more open mindset. In the West, people enjoy freedom of speech which demonstrates their tolerance for non-conformance.

Arguably a more conservative nation promotes the herd mentality, where tooting the line is highly valued as opposed to expressing discontentment. According to research, the herd mentality could mean choosing a future career off the beaten track. Many youngsters are pressured into a career path by their parents, teachers, friends and other well-meaning people. Ultimately, deciding against the common choices because it does not suit you is a tough but important decision.

Do you voice out your opinion or remain silent? Silence is often treated as agreement. A milestone in human rights and social justice is the rights of homosexuals. The rights of homosexuals to marry. King’s decision was not only unpopular but against the law at that time. His intolerance which caused many to take it upon themselves to stand up for what they believe in. It could be a human rights issue that you are passionate about or choosing a non-traditional career path. Leaders are proactive in any situation. They take it upon themselves to do something about the issue at hand. Being proactive and standing up requires confidence which radiates from leaders.

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SOCIAL networks are part and parcel of everyday life. They influence what we eat, whom we marry, whether we vote, how rich we are and much more. However, we have the power to shape our social networks too. How are social networks formed? It is firstly a group of people with a specific set of connections or ties between their members. It is often these connections and their shapes that are more important than the individuals of the social network. They allow groups to do things that unconnected individuals cannot and offer explanations as to why the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Likewise the particular shapes of these connections allow us to understand how networks function.

IN THE THICK OF IT
In simple terms, a social network is a decentralised but interconnected set of people that consists of human beings and the connections between them. Real everyday social networks are also organic—continuously evolving based upon the natural tendencies of people to make friends. We find it natural to make friends, and thus our ability to make few or many friends, to have large or small networks, is determined by personal tendencies, but the sum of all of them. Regardless, two fundamental aspects govern all social networks:

1. They do so by:
   - Facilitating interpersonal bonds
   - Synchronising behaviour

2. We influence how densely connected people are to the social network. A person with few friends will have a very different life from one who is the life of a social group. Likewise, how many contacts your friends and family have plays an equally important role in our own lives.

RULE 2: OUR NETWORK SHAPES US
In turn, our place in the network affects us. A person with few friends will have a very different life from one who is the life of a social group. Likewise, how many contacts your friends and family have plays an equally important role in our own lives.

RULE 3: OUR FRIENDS AFFECT US
Just as we affect others, so too are we affected by our friends through the choices they make. It is not just the shape of the network that is important but what flows through these networks.

RULE 4: OUR FRIENDS’ FRIENDS AFFECT US
We do not merely copy our friends but our friends’ friends and their friend’s friends. This is known as a hyperdyad spread whereby effects have the tendency to spread from individual to individual through direct social ties up to 3 degrees.

RULE 5: THE NETWORK HAS A LIFE OF ITS OWN
Social networks also have properties and functions beyond the people within them. This is known as emergent properties, new attributes of a whole that arise from the interaction and connection of the parts, much like how a cake’s taste is not found in any of its individual ingredients, but the sum of all of them. Similarly, understanding social networks allows us to see how the whole of human behaviour is greater than the sum of its parts.

SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION AND THREE DEGREES OF INFLUENCE
We will often hear the phrase “six degrees of separation” (your friend is one degree from you; your friend’s friend is two degrees; and so on). Masterminded by Stanley Milgram, an experiment was done in the 1960s showing just how connected people were by giving a few hundred people who lived in Nebraska a letter addressed to a businessman in Boston—more than a thousand miles away—with the goal of getting the letter to someone they thought would be more likely than they to have a personal relationship with the Boston businessman. Amazingly, it took an average of six hops for the letter to arrive in most cases. This was further expanded upon in 2002 when sociologist Duncan Watts and his colleagues decided to replicate the experiment but on a global scale with e-mail to a list of eighteen possible targets. Remarkably the number of hops it took was on average six.

However, our sphere of influence as an individual generally has a significant impact on only three degrees. There are three reasons for this:

1. In what is known as the Milgram-decay explanation, much like in the game of Chinese whispers, we experience a social decay in the accuracy and reliability of information that is travelled and thus eventually diluted.

2. Influence may also decline because of an unavoidable evolution in the networks that makes anything beyond three degrees unstable. For example, our friends change or neighbours move. This is known as network-instability explanation.

3. Thirdly, humans seem to have evolved in small groups whereby we are connected to each other within three degrees or less. We have not lived in large groups long enough for us to extend our influence beyond those that are three degrees removed from us. This is the evolutionary-purpose explanation.

While this might seem limited in how we influence others and in turn are influenced, it is exactly the opposite. Consider for example if you have 20 social contacts that in turn have 20 other contacts each and so on. That would equal a total of 20x20x20 or 8,000 people that could possibly be influenced by you.

WHEN YOU SMILE, THE WORLD SMILES WITH YOU
IN LAUGHING MANNER
In 1962 in Tanzania an epidemic of laughing spread through many villages resulting in the closing of several schools. This was a result of a mass psychogenic illness also known as epidemic hysteria and was eventually traced back to three teenage girls. However peculiar it may seem, such emotional stampedes are quite common though on a smaller scale. If you come home and are in a bad mood, your partner will often detect it long before your explanation. And before you have a chance to explain, the situation already have caught it from you leading to an argument. Emotions have thus helped coordinated activity since the beginning of time and probably even preceded language.

THEY DO SO BY:
- Communicating information
- Facilitating interpersonal bonds
- Synchronising behaviour

EMOTIONAL CONTAGION
Emotional Contagion spreads for two reasons:

1. We are biologically hardwired to outwardly mimic others.
2. We benefit from adopting the inward state of others.

In their research, the authors took a sample of 32,067 people from Framingham, Massachusetts in 2000, mapping out their social ties and their relative levels of happiness. The following two observations were made:

- Unhappy people clustered with unhappy people in the network and happy people with the happy.
- Unhappy people tend to form the edges of a network or are at the end of the social relationship chain.

The reasons for these clusters are varied. Happy people, for example, might choose each other as friends or situate themselves in environments that raise them to be happy. However, such clustering has also been found to be the casual effect of personal happiness on another’s. Analyses of networks suggest that an individual is 1.5 times more likely to be happy if there is a directly connected individual (at one degree of separation) who is happy. Similar effects are found to be true for people connected at two and three degrees of separation but at a diminishing percentage. At four degrees the effect becomes negligible.

Compare this in turn to the effect of having a higher income. An increase of £20,000 to £20,000 in 2009 was associated with a 2% increase in the chance of an individual being happy. Here, proximity has been found to be equally important. It was found that when a friend living less than a mile away becomes happy, it can increase the chances of you being happy by 25%. This is because with increased proximity there is also an increased frequency in face-to-face interactions.

Happiness is therefore not simply a function of individual experience; it is a property of entire groups. Changes in an individual happiness can ripple through social connections and create positive feedback in the network, giving rise to clusters of happy and unhappy people. Our family and friends’ emotions have significant implications in ours.

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Simply submit your resume and you’ll be in the running to win a brand new Proton Inspira. Hurry! Contest ends 16 March 2013.

**THE FINAL CAR GIVEAWAY.**

While we smile less at work than we do at home, 30% of subjects in a research study smiled five to 20 times a day, and 28% smiled over 20 times per day at the office.

Happy people make better decisions

– unhappy people operate in permanent crisis mode. Their focus narrows, they lose sight of the big picture, their survival instincts kick in and they’re more likely to make short-term, here-and-now choices. Conversely, happy people make better, more informed decisions and are better able to prioritise their work.

The person who cares the most will often end up doing a task. If you care more about a task being done, you’re more likely to end up doing it and not expect other people to care as much as you do, just because something is important to you.

According to PC World, the five best productivity apps to have in your smartphones are CallFlakes, Glyder, Mailshot, Maluuba: Your Siri Alternative, and Workflowy.

According to MayoClinic.com, having breakfast will improve concentration, productivity, problem-solving, creativity and hand-eye coordination at work.

Your job description defines your workday but your performance review is how you earn raises and bonuses.

You will spend at least 60% of your life working: That includes the time you spend at work, as well as all the time you spend preparing for it, looking for it, commuting to it and recovering from it during the weekend.

We all know that drinking more water is important, but did you know that just a 2% drop in hydration level can lead to difficulty focusing on the computer screen, short-term memory problems and difficulty in completing basic tasks?

25% of people check into work hourly while on vacation, via email and phone. 59% said they check work during traditional holidays like Christmas. Basically, work is everywhere.

According to myStarjob.com, Saturday 2 March 2013

**CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR PREVIOUS WINNER**

PAN BEE SIM, the proud owner of a new Proton Persona.
DEAR VALLI,

Thank you for writing in. If you’re looking for a career path that is in demand in the near future, you’re in luck. Just about every leading employer is hungry for talent, particularly for talent that is hungry to pursue a career in the near (and probably for quite a bit longer term) future. Asia is driving global economic growth and Malaysia is at the heart of Asia. Malaysia is blessed for having strong historical, cultural and commercial links with the fastest growing economies of India, China and Indonesia. Malaysia is where the action is and under the Economic Transformation Programme, various sectors are growing strongly including but not limited to oil and gas, electronics, banking, telecommunications and healthcare.

Within each of these key sectors are leading employers – some Malaysian corporations which are transforming into regional champions, such as Maybank, Axina and HH Healthcare. In addition, Malaysia has also successfully attracted many multinationals to set up regional operations here. You are spoilt for choice as the competitiveness and growth of these key sectors creates more higher value added (and higher income) jobs.

With that said, competitiveness is a key factor. The success of a sector in Malaysia, companies, and right down to individual talent like yourself, depends on being competitive, not just at a local level but also in competing internationally. To thrive in an increasingly globally competitive environment, it is important for a talent like you, to be very good in his field and I believe you can only be very good if you have a passion for your career of choice, which includes the willingness to invest time and hard work into developing one’s area of interest. From your specific question on psychology, I would presume that you at least have an interest and potentially a passion for psychology. If that is where your passion lies, I would definitely not discourage you from pursuing it.

Of course, in pursuing one’s interest, one should ensure that it can translate to a viable career. You will be happy to know that an initial degree in Psychology does open up several potential career pathways. One potential pathway is to become a clinical psychologist. However, you will need to be prepared to continue your education for a duration of seven years in order to earn the necessary qualifications. Further, it is still a niche area in Malaysia. Perhaps you will need to spend five years pursuing your first degree and be sure before you commit to this path.

In the event, you subsequently opt not to pursue the clinical path, do not fear. Psychology as a first degree, is a good degree (I can vouch for it as an employer, as I have one psychology grad working for me). There are many Psychology graduates who later choose to pursue careers in sales and marketing, management consulting and human resources. They are clearly learnings from the degree that can be applied in such careers. Furthermore, sales, consulting and human resources are obviously fields which support each and every one of the key growth sectors of Malaysia. Hence, there will be demand for you, especially if you are psychologically prepared to succeed in your career of choice. I am sympathetic to your situation. It is always tricky when there seem to be so many choices.

In conclusion, you need to start to figure out for yourself – what your strengths are and where your interests and passion lie? Develop your skills in the area of your interest but be pragmatic in finding out what it takes to pursue the career of choice and transitioning from school to work. I leave you with a final piece of advice, “Sometimes there is no one right choice to make, just make a choice and then make it the right one.” Good luck!

JOHAN MERICAN

HI VALLI,

Let me first answer the second part of your question. Demand fed to someone with a psychology degree is definitely higher than it was a decade ago. Employers look forward to having a degree that can work in areas such as organisational development, human resources, counselling (for universities or schools), career counselling, talent assessment, training, and even consultants. Apart from business consultants, most roles related to this qualification would undeniably be more people related.

To answer the first part of your question, I trust you understand that some careers may be more in demand in one country compared with another. That said, you won’t go wrong looking at something that allows you to acquire skills that you can showcase later to your employers and clients. For example, I have many friends who graduated with high grades in engineering degree who are excelling in areas like branding, finance, strategy, consulting and other non-engineering related fields. This does not indicate that they have chosen the wrong course to study. On the other hand, they share that their three years in university in the chosen course have helped shape their analytical thinking that has very much contributed to their success in the given role.

Remember also, that more than the qualification, your learning agility will also determine if you are able to work in an area that is out of your learned field. Having that mental capacity and an attitude that is willing to be taught and corrected, there are many career choices out there for you. So choose your career, understand the skills (not paper qualifications) that you need to have to be successful, then plan how you can build yourself up in that area. Do bear in mind that if you are keen to be an engineer, accountant, architect or other professional, having a related degree is a must.

Hope this helps.

All the best!

ELISA DASS AVIN

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

SHARPEN YOUR AXE

Find out what attributes make a great innovation leader in Hard Talk

How synchronising your personal brand to that of your company can benefit your career?

Putting a human touch to relationships in the office can bring positive ripple effects

Engage the people around you to support your growth