Sharpen Your Axe

Daily personal growth is critical for leadership success, says Roshan Thiran in Be A Leader.

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TALENTCORP CEO
Johan Merican reveals how his failings drove him to succeed

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L ast Saturday, 1M4Youth organised the Reach Out event and I had the opportunity to meet with three celebrity YouTubers – Chester See, Davin Chai and Jason Chen. These “singers” have become luminaries on YouTube with massive followings and I had the privilege together with my team from Leaderonomics to spend some time with them and get to ask them some questions about their fame.

One question I posed to them was about the “innovativeness” in their music and how they came up with good music. All of them agreed the inspiration for their music came from different sources and from their life experiences. As we continued the line of questioning and starting to discuss if they had anticipated this fame when they first posted on YouTube, they all shook their heads and said they had no idea that their work would become so popular. In fact, they went on to say that if anyone set out to be famous and popular, they would most likely fail. All three of them had a deep desire to do good quality work and their “product” which they toiled to produce was all they were focused on. Innovative work will get noticed and then fame and fortune will arrive.

In fact, it is the same with inventors. They are very much like artists and musicians. They don’t set out to be famous. Instead, they identify a problem and seek out the answer. Many of them don’t set out to be famous but instead set out to “change the world”. Orville and Wilbur Wright did not set out to be renowned, instead they set out to “change the world” through flight. And they became legends. Likewise with Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell and even Steve Jobs. They looked to solve problems and resolve issues the world was facing. Becoming a celebrity and eminent was the last thing on their minds.

This should be the same with us. As we work, we should not be focused on the promotion or the higher salary but on high quality and innovative work. If we continuously provide our employer with innovative solutions and high productivity, the higher salary and big promotions are bound to come.

I recall when I was starting out in my first few roles while I was working in the United States, my “success” was not planned. Rather it was clearly the result of being extremely innovative. In one of my early roles, I automated all my work and ended up reducing 50 hours of work weekly into five hours. I had so much time to help my colleagues automate their work. This drove productivity in the organisation 100-fold. Guess who got the big role when our boss moved on? The engineer who helped everyone complete more work in less time through automation of course! And everyone was pleased and not upset even with my promotion.

Being innovative is key to your career success. And it starts with curiosity and questioning. Every role I move to, I always ask questions – why does it take so long? Why do we do this? Why can’t we do it differently? I usually never get answers and so I try to answer these questions myself. Soon, I find faster, better, cheaper, easier ways to get work done. I innovate and soon results follow. Just like Chester See, Jason Chen and David Choi “innovated” their music distribution via YouTube and were focused on their work, likewise we need to focus on our work to ensure it is innovative. Success is bound to follow. This week in the career guide, we look at how to grow your career by being innovative at work. Enjoy the tips and career advice given in this week’s issue.

So, read on this week and we do hope you will 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.tv or at our main home site www.leaderonomics.com.

We wish you all the best in your career journey! I have also started a site on Facebook where I share daily leadership wisdom. If you are keen, go over to http://www.facebook.com/roshanthiran.leaderonomics and like and subscribe. If you have any feedback on the pullout, feel free to email us at mystarjob@leaderonomics.com. Have a wonderful work week ahead and don’t forget – be innovative always!

Warm regards,

ROSHAN THIRAN
Editor, myStarjob.com & CEO, Leaderonomics
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SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Johan Merican relishes in talent scouting for the country.

By ANGIE NG
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Failure and setbacks in life come in different forms when one least expects them. But instead of succumbing to failure, those who learn from it are likely to emerge wiser and may even join the ranks of the who’s who among notable people.

TalentCorp Malaysia Bhd CEO Johan Mahmood Merican knows this only too well as he recalls not just one failure but a series of them at different facets of his life.

“With the benefit of hindsight, there were at least three series of failures that I have experienced during the course of my schooling days, to university, and while pursuing my career,” the 39-year-old Johan shares with myStarjob.com in a recent interview.

In a frank assessment of his younger days, Johan says he first got inflicted with the “failure bug” when he was still a carefree lad of about 15.

He was not measuring up in school and his school teachers complained to his parents about the quality of his school work and that he did not do his homework nor prepare for his examinations.

His parents were not impressed with the grades in his report card compared with his two older brothers and a sister, causing them to worry that he would not perform as well in his upcoming SRP examination.

A key turning point was when one day Johan overheard his parents discussing about him. His mother was concerned, asking his dad to push Johan harder to study. However, in trying to calm his mother, his dad suggested that perhaps they just needed to accept that Johan was not academically inclined, not clever like his siblings.

“It was painful to hear. It jolted me out of my slumber. It made me question myself; was I stupid? Was I the black sheep of the family? It woke up the kiasu-ness in me. I dug up my siblings’ SRP results, pasted it on the wall at my desk, to remind myself every day to study hard and prove that I was just as good as my siblings,” Johan recalls.

He went on to do better at school, studying at St. John’s Institution in Kuala Lumpur, getting “almost straight A’s” in his SRP in 1987 and SPM in 1989, but more importantly for him, getting grades that were at least as good as his siblings.

The second failure was in trying to get into university. When studying A-levels in the UK, one applies to university before he sits for his A-levels examinations and aims to secure a conditional offer, which is an acceptance into university subject to securing the required grades at A-levels.

“To bury the ghost of earlier academic failures, I set my sights on getting Cambridge. The only problem was that to get into Cambridge, one needed to get through an interview. By this time, I was a lean, mean examination machine. I knew my stuff but I just couldn’t communicate at the interview,” explains Johan.

He failed to get an offer from Cambridge but continued to ace his A-levels examinations with straight As.

“Getting rejected by Cambridge was a setback but very good as a humbling experience. Before I could get too cocky about doing well at school, it brought me back to the ground, telling me it is not enough just to be a straight-A student. I highly recommend setbacks, the more the merrier, to avoid the risk of getting arrogant if one is getting too successful,” he says.

HUMBLING YET EMPOWERING

But as luck would have it, a candidate who qualified for the Cambridge Sime Darby scholarship that year failed to make the grades to enter University of Cambridge. On top of that, Cambridge was agreeable to his being retained as an audit assistant and became an audit senior two years later. At the end of his third year at the firm during appraisal time to assess his performance, Johan was flabbergasted when he was ranked bottom among his more than 50-odd peers.

This meant that he was the only one not promoted to assistant manager while the rest were all upgraded.

Johan remembers scoring top marks for his professional examinations but yet did badly at his work performance.

“It was quite humiliating to be retained as an audit senior while the rest of my peers were promoted over me,” he recalls. Although it was bad for the ego, Johan appreciated the opportunity to learn a good lesson.

“It is indeed a humbling experience. Sometimes we become over confident and we need the pain of failure to jolt us, take the appropriate action and change course. I learned that just turning in top academic grades alone does not guarantee a smooth sailing career. In the work place, one needs to work as a team, have good EQ and be consistent in performance, whereas as a student, one only needs to tap into the IQ bank and peak during exams and assignments,” he explains.

STAYING CHALLENGED

Sharing his thoughts on failure, Johan says: “Throughout history, I am sure no one has achieved great success without having gone through many failures. I probably need a few more failures before I can be really successful.”

“There is no need to fear failure or be shamefaced of having failed, what is important is to learn the invaluable lessons from it and grow. So, go ahead and fail,” Johan advises.

He says those who had never failed before may be keeping themselves in their comfort zone and not pushing themselves enough to realise their full potential.

“Another key learning from doing badly at audit for me, was that I couldn’t do well in something I wasn’t passionate about,” explains Johan. He decided that auditing was not his cup of tea and made up his mind to return to work in Malaysia.

That decision marked a new chapter for him as he sought out opportunities in new capacities, in search of passion.

Prior to his appointment on Jan 1, 2011, as the CEO of TalentCorp, Johan worked in corporate finance and accounting roles at various companies such as MRCA, UDA Holdings, Sime Darby and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

“However, it has only been my work in the public sector that has been particularly fulfilling. It sounds almost strange to say it, finding my passion working in government,” says Johan.

“It did, however, take a while to find my purpose. It was only after nine years in the private sector that I joined the Government,” he adds. Johan joined the Finance Ministry in 2004 and the Economic Planning Unit in 2009 before coming onboard TalentCorp in 2011.

“What I love about working in Government is the opportunity to make a difference,” explains Johan. “I know many people who love to go and on and on about what is wrong about the country and the Government. My response to them is that no country is without its problems and without our problems, there would be nothing to fix and there would be far less opportunity to do good for the place we call home,” Johan concludes with a smile.
A Leader Is Never Deterred By Failure

We all fear failure. The best leaders in the world fail all the time but instead of fearing failure, they embrace it.

Thomas Edison failed 10,000 times before he perfected the light bulb. He never let failure wear him down. Walt Disney was fired from his first job for not “being creative”. He went on to creating the ‘most creative company in the world’ – DISNEY. Michael Jordan failed miserably in his first basketball trial and failed to make his high-school basketball team. That never stopped him from becoming the best.

Leaders are not born, they just learn from their mistakes. The great leaders in the world learn from their failure, and grow from it. Everyone can be a leader. Its about digging deep within us and never letting failure discourage us.

Be A Leader.
Sharpen Your Axe

By ROSHAN THIRAN
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Roshan Thiran is CEO of Leaderonomics, a social-enterprise passionate about transform - ing the nation through leadership development. Follow www.leaderonomics.tv for great TV shows on how to sharpen your axe or follow Roshan’s daily leadership wisdom page at http://www.facebook.com/rosanthiran.

A few years ago while in Lawas, Sarawak, I was told this story of a very strong and skilled Kayan woodcutter who asked for a job with a timber merchant. He got the job with a good salary and decent work conditions. And so, the woodcutter was determined to do his best for the boss.

His boss gave him an axe and on his first day, the woodcutter chopped down 15 trees. The boss was pleased and said, “Well done, good work!”

Highly motivated, the woodcutter tried harder the next day, but he only could bring down 13 trees. The third day, he tried even harder, but he was only able to bring down 11 trees. Day after day, he tried harder but cut down a smaller number of trees.

“I must be losing my strength,” the Kayan man thought. He apologised to the boss, claiming he could not understand why.

“When was the last time you sharpened your axe?” the boss asked.

“Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I have been too busy cutting down trees…”

He sharpened his axe and immediately was back to felling 15 trees a day. And since that conversation, he begins the day by sharpening his axe.

Most leaders are too busy doing and trying to achieve that they never take time to learn and grow. Most of us don’t have the time or patience to update skills, knowledge, and beliefs about an industry, or to take time to think and reflect. Many assume that learning ends at school and so sharpening our axe is not a priority.

So, what exactly is sharpening the axe?

Dr Steven Covey, who popularised the term, believes that it means “increasing your personal production capacity by daily self-care and self-maintenance”. Most people fail to understand what it means and mistake it for taking a break or vacation. If you’re overworking yourself and your productivity drops, take a break. However, that isn’t sharpening the axe – that’s putting the axe down.

When you put down a dull blade and rest, the blade will still be dull when you pick it up. The woodcutter does need downtime to rest, but it is not “sharpening the axe”. The woodcutter only becomes more productive by sharpening his blade, analysing new woodcutting techniques, exercising to become stronger, and learning from other woodcutters.

Sharpening the axe is an activity. You too can sharpen the axe of your life. Here are examples of axe-sharpening activities:

1. Read a book every day.
2. Get out of your comfort zone by changing jobs. A new job forces you to learn.
3. Have a deep conversation with someone you find interesting. Sharpen your axe through that interaction.
4. Pick up a new hobby. Stretch yourself physically, mentally or emotionally.
5. Study something new.
6. Overcome a specific fear you have or quit a bad habit.
7. Have a daily exercise routine or take part in some competition.
8. Identify your blind spots. Understand, acknowledge, and address them.
9. Ask for feedback and get a mentor.
10. Learn from people who inspire you.

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Have you to do it as often as possible. But if you’re so focused on your task at hand with no time for discussion, introspection, or study, you’re not really moving forward. Just as a car needs to be refuelled with petrol to keep it going, we likewise need refuelling through learning.

The Management Mythbuster author DavidAaxon believes most organisations still rely on outdated management strategies that are irrelevant today. Unless we are sharpening our axe daily by observing the changing world and changing ourselves accordingly, we risk becoming irrelevant.

Andrew Grove reinvented Intel and over a 4,500-time increase in market capitalisation by his daily habit of “axe-sharpening” ritual of understanding global changes and taking advantage of it to ensure Intel remain relevant.

Employees at Japanese organisations like Toyota believe it’s a crisis if they do not create improvement each day. The “kaizen mindset” means that every day, whether you are a line worker or executive, you find ways to learn something new and apply it to what you are doing. This daily organisational ritual of “sharpening the axe” forces employees to be alert, mindful and constantly improving.

Great leaders, like Gandhi, Mandela and Steve Jobs have a continuous appetite for learning and growth. They always listen and watch in the hope of learning new ideas and discovering new truths and realities.

Interestingly, many of us do just the opposite. By staying in the same job for many years, although we become experts and the role becomes easy, our learning flattens. We don’t like changing jobs as there is pain and struggle involved in taking on new roles. But, the more we struggle, the more learning we glean.

But when a new boss with new expectations takes over, we sometimes find ourselves struggling even though we have been at the same role for years. We try harder but still fail to impress. Why does this happen?

Much like the woodcutter, trying harder will not yield results. This is because we did not sharpen ourselves nor grow in the “easy” years. Our years of experience count for nothing as we did not keep up with the world around us and were ignorant and mindless of things that were evolving daily around us. Two weeks ago, I interviewed Harvard professor Ellen Langer who reminded me of our natural inclination to be mindless. Mindlessness is our human tendency to operate on auto pilot, whether by stereotyping, performing mechanically or simply not paying attention. We are all victims of being mindless at times. By sharpening our axe, we move from a mindless state to a mindful state, from “blindly going with the flow” to thinking and “breaking boundaries”.

Why then do so many people fail to sharpen their axe? Well, axe sharpening isn’t as fun as whacking away at the trees. And it is painful and tedious work.

David McKay adds that, “the greatest battles of life are fought out daily in the silent chambers of the soul”. Sharpening the axe is a daily inner interval battle. Research reveals that self-educated presidents like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln sharpened their axe daily by cultivating the discipline of reading.

In a number of Asian organisations, when there is a crisis or financial situation, the first thing that gets slashed is training programmes for employees. Yet, in a crisis, there is a greater need for employees to have sharpened axes to deal with issues.

Crisis often cause companies to become great because they finally take time to “sharpen their axe” by re-looking at their current strategies and reinventing their industries, sometimes through painful reforms. The South Korean auto industry before the 1998 Asian financial crisis was jaguh kampung and known for low-quality cars with strong domestic car sales. The crisis forced it to take a step back, sharpen its axe, become mindful to the world and move to sell the majority of its cars outside South Korea.

Of course, too much axe or aimless sharpening can become another form of procrastination. Many like to attend trainings and classes but never end up using the axe. After sharpening the axe, use it or all is in vain.

How are your various blades doing? Your skills, knowledge, mind, physical body, relationships, motivation, commitment to succeed, capacity for growth, emotions – are all of them still sharp? If not, which ones are dull, and what can you do to sharpen them?

Lincoln once said “give me six hours to chop down a tree and I’ll spend the first four sharpening my axe”. What are you doing to sharpen your axe? Take a step back this week and start sharpening your axe.

Employ your time in improving yourself by other men’s writings, so that you shall gain easily what others have laboured hard for.” Socrates
When faced with a problem in the workplace, try to solve it first on your own without asking for your colleagues’ help. That way, you will discover the various issues at hand, and understand the connections better. When you do that, you will find out what needs improvement and what can be changed.

8. HOLD BRAIN STORMING SESSIONS

It is often easier to come up with ideas when more people think together. So gather a group of colleagues and brainstorm about certain issues that you feel need to be improved. By discussing together, you can all contribute to ideas and you can get inspired by something that a colleague has to say. Be ready to share the credit though!

7. REDUCE STRESS

A stressed and tired employee is not able to think with clarity. It is therefore very hard for him/her to come up with innovative ways of improving the workplace. Find ways to reduce your stress levels by managing your time better, listening to relaxing music, going for a family holiday, or anything else that works for you.

5. SPEND TIME ON LONG-TERM THOUGHTS

It can be difficult to find the time to come up with innovative ideas. We are usually so bogged down with our daily tasks that we do not have time to think about improving our processes, or even the quality of our products. Find a way to dedicate some time to think about long-term goals, and the best way to sustain the process/service/product in question for much longer.

6. READ READ READ

There is no better way to get inspiration than reading – read about anything and everything. Broadening your horizons and reading about topics as diverse as gardening, science and anthropology can definitely give you a wide range of ideas on how to incorporate principles or norms from various contexts and environments to your workplace.

4. BE CURIOUS

Never stop wanting to find out more about different aspects of your work and processes than you follow; why things are done in a certain way, and the products or services that you provide. Once you stop being curious, you will not be able to come up with ingenious ways of improving the processes and products.


Keep asking questions all the time – keep challenging your bosses and colleagues as well as yourself by questioning every part of your work. When you ask questions, you trigger people’s minds and force them to think about a particular problem. That way, they will be able to see what is really wrong with the issue and how they can change it.

2. DON’T ACCEPT THE STATUS QUO

Just because something has been done a certain way for a long time, it does not mean that it is right. Be willing to question and redesign old habits. Do not feel that you have to follow everyone else; instead observe and analyse carefully and when you find that there is something wrong with a current way of performing tasks – discuss with your colleagues and see how you can make a change.

1. TAKE THE RISK!

It is often intimidating to come up with new ideas. We often feel that our supervisors and colleagues may disapprove of us. However, you should be willing to take risks and put forward an innovative idea that you may have – just be sure to do all the necessary research first.

10. BE FLEXIBLE

Having an open mindset and being able to accept change is key to allowing you to accept, and implement innovation. Be willing to adapt to new circumstances – do not be afraid of new ways of doing an old task, or a new product that you suddenly need to sell.

To view our Top 10 videos, visit www.leaderonomics.tv/top10
Innovation - the reason for existence and this inspires the **HOW**, which is to create innovative, easy outcome. For example, Apple’s **WHY** is to use computers, and lastly **WHAT** happened would be selling computers, the **HOW** makes it the most innovative company in the world.

What’s more intriguing here is that just like any conventional young man growing up, he pursued a good college education and graduated with a law degree from New York University and even practised law in a firm. But it was in 2004 that he left his job and pursued becoming a Lego artist. **WHY** Because he wanted to pursue his childhood passion and dream which is to have fun and show the world his creativity and inspire creativity in the process. How did he do it? He used simple Lego bricks to create world-class masterpieces. And of course exactly what happened next is history in the making; he is now one of the most sought after artists with sold out exhibitions around the world. The world would not have seen his beautiful creations if he had just used a conventional way to make a living by being a lawyer. He truly is an innovator.

One way to discover your **WHY** is to observe a need. Every great business addresses a need. Once you identify a compelling need, you will be able to discover your **WHY**. For example, everyone knows Nestle as a great company but this great company started off with a compelling why. Henry Nestle started working on the infant formula project because he wanted to save lives. Being a pharmacist assistant, he noticed the high infant death rate in his family. Half of the 14 children died before reaching adulthood. He combined cow’s milk with wheat, flour and sugar to produce a substitute of mother’s milk for those children who could not accept breast-feeding. His **WHY** was to save lives and the **HOW** was done by using whatever knowledge he had together with his wife who was a daughter of a charity doctor and the **WHAT** is of course the beginning of a great company in the making. Indeed great things happen when we start with the **WHY**. This truly inspires innovation.

The same has happened with companies at our backyard, such as AniAsia. Tan Sri Tony Fernandes saw a need; his **WHY** was to give people especially those who have been neglected by the airline industry an opportunity to fly. The **HOW** was done through a low cost model which includes direct web purchase and of course the end result is that they are now the best low cost airline in the world.

Once you have identified your **WHY** by observing a need or creating one, then you can focus on the **HOW**. Innovation can happen anywhere and anytime. It is often mistaken to be confined to a product or invention. But innovation for a company can happen in 10 ways according to Doblin’s 10 types of innovation.

They are categorised in terms of configuration, offering and experience. Tune in to my next article where I will discuss further about the **HOW** using Doblin’s 10 types of innovation with examples. But for now I would like to conclude by saying, start asking the pertinent question: **“WHY” do you do what you do?** Find a compelling purpose, observe a need, seek inspiration, challenge the implicit assumption by even asking “why not”. Do something new! It does not have to be complicated. You can be innovative in your everyday life; this is something I learned from my retired father-in-law. He invents small devices, inventions and simple gadgets to address household needs such as custom made covers for the locks made from old shampoo bottles in order to lengthen their lifespan. Don’t be afraid of what people will think of you. At all events every great moment starts with an idea!
THE CRITICAL ATTRIBUTES OF Innovation Leaders

By Jean-Philippe Deschamps

Innovation leaders are senior executives champions who stimulate, support, sustain and lead innovation in their companies. They share six common attributes that distinguish them from other senior corporate leaders. Such leaders combine executive skills, a passion for sharing their passion with others, and a knack for attracting and building winning teams, and have a talent for creativity with firm process orientation, thinks in a different way. They are also able to build and steer winning teams. However, not all innovation leaders are "executive champions" who stimulate, set stretch goals and measure performance on innovation. Each company should have a corporate officer whose role is to innovate. The ability to balance the different types of innovation strategies and each company should make sure they have the right types of leaders. Each company should make sure they have the right types of leaders.

New PRODUCT OUR OR SERVICE OFFERING

For creating new products or services, companies need “mentors” who will challenge leaders, capable of setting up and steering winning teams and leading them to market. They need a strategy for sponsoring providing resources and top management support to the teams, selecting from the different teams that will develop them, and coaching them through the usual ups and downs of most innovation projects.

New BUSINESS MODEL OR BUSINESS SYSTEM

For creating business models or systems, companies need “catalysts” who will assemble internal and external providers of system solutions or systems, in a single solution or system, to innovate? Radically or incrementally? Analytics tells us both leaders can succeed no matter the effort, if they are able to learn from them. And if a project isn’t going to succeed no matter the effort, they need “mentors”, trusting but challenging leaders, capable of setting up and steering venture teams to innovate, or reengineering, is not given to formulas. True. But who has time?

Self-empowered – able to drop your responsibilities, get new ideas, new projects, genuinely innovative for others.

Visionary – in addition to maintaining a future orientation, they maintain a mental picture.

Network connections – well-connected into seemingly disconnected elements, synthesizes odd combinations, deconstructs usual concepts, gets to the root of innovation.

Fulfills ambiguity – comfortable with chaos, able to reduce ambiguity’s chaotic siren song to steadier channels.

Reflective – excels on problems and challenges, seeks out states of immersion, ponders, moves and combines.

Committed to learning – continually seeks knowledge, following new suppression and systems, quickly adapts to new information gathering and action.

Situationality – balances napped in a moving political siren, with room for dialogue and support, skills need as needed.

Balance intuition and analysis – alternative between emergent and convergent thinking, entertains hunches before analyzing them, trusts their gut, uses their head.

"Qualities of an INNOVATOR"

"Executive champions” who stimulate, set stretch goals and measure performance on innovation. Each company should have a corporate officer whose role is to innovate. The ability to balance the different types of innovation strategies and each company should make sure they have the right types of leaders. Each company should make sure they have the right types of leaders.
ESIDES aligning your career goals to your core values, you will also need to harness the energy of other people to get to where you want to be. It goes without saying that whatever your dream is – whether to become a doctor, lawyer, politician, entrepreneur, philanthropist or scientist – at some point, you will need to interact with people. This is a skill that should be acquired from a young age.

Unless your dream is to work in a vacuum and remain anonymous to everyone, you will need to learn to work with other people including colleagues, partners, bosses, subordinates, constituents, customers or even critics. People may be a major or minor factor, depending on what you desire to achieve. But no matter what, you will need to engage people if you want to achieve your dream.

Your ability to engage others is largely influenced by how people generally feel when they are around you, and it is ideal when there is a strong and positive emotional attachment to the cause at hand. People will be inclined to respond to you if they feel that they are appreciated and acknowledged. They must also perceive you as honest and sincere. It all depends on how well you connect with others while making them feel safe when they are around you.

In other words, if you want to realise your dreams, you will need a team to assist you. There is a long list of things that a team can do for you but in general, a team, regardless of purpose/content, brings about the following values to your pursuit, according to John C. Maxwell:

- My team empowers me to realise my dream.
- My team helps me to fulfill the desires of my life.
- My team provides me with companionship.
- My team gives me more time.
- My team allows me to help others do their projects.
- My team multiplies my value to others.
- My team makes me better.

Some people have a dream but no team – their dream is impossible.

Some people have a dream and a bad team – their dream is a nightmare.

Some people have a dream and are building a team – their dream has potential.

Some people have a dream and a great team – their dream is inevitable.

It’s not enough to have a dream. You must also have a dream team.

No doubt, a lot of successful people have been down and out numerous times, and have had to start from scratch. Having the right attitude and being able to engage others are absolutely essential both in sports and life. You can have all the talent in the world, but without the right attitude and trust, you will not get anywhere.

Take a cue from the story of any successful person who had achieved a dream, and you will find that he or she is surrounded by people who had helped to make it happen.

To her, a person that does not have strong beliefs, a vision and mission in life, has very little to contribute towards the enrichment of him/herself or those around them. “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision,” she once said. And this is an idea we should constantly keep reminding ourselves of. So often we get absorbed in our daily tasks – mundane routines, and the need to carry on our work in fear of losing our jobs. How often do we think of our vision? For a better world, but even closer to us, for a better us? How do we justify our everyday actions? Do we have a purpose for what we do? And, taking it a bit further – how selfish are we? Do we only think of ourselves? Do we think of a vision for the place we work at? Do we want to contribute towards the betterment of the establishment? What about our community? Are we thinking of our role in it and how we can help its development into something greater?

A vision makes our actions more meaningful. It makes our everyday lives, our careers and all our interactions contribute towards something. So go ahead and think of yours!
YOU AND YOUR COMPANY: MAKING THE CORPORATE BRAND/PERSONAL BRAND CONNECTION

By BRENDA BENCE
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OU may already know that defining and communicating your unique personal brand on the job is a powerful way to further your career. But have you ever thought about the connection between your personal brand and your company’s brand? Whether we’re talking about personal brands or corporate brands, here’s a secret that the best marketers know: Great brands don’t get to be successful just by accident. In fact, there is a tried-and-true formula for building great brands, and it starts with defining core elements. These elements fit together like puzzle pieces to define your personal brand or your company’s brand, and they reflect what you want your firm – or YOU – to stand for. How does your personal brand line up with your company’s brand in terms of these six elements?

1. TARGET MARKET/AUDIENCE. Who does your company target as existing or potential customers for its products or services? BMW targets wealthier customers than Toyota, for example. Cueno targets younger customers than Simmoff. Just as your company focuses on who it wants as its customers, your personal brand should also be focused on the people at work who can most impact your career and future. They make up your personal brand’s “audience.”

2. NEEDS. Your company meets the needs of its customers through its products or services. What role does that “connection” play in your career success? And how do you determine if your personal brand is out of sync with your company’s brand?

3. COMPETITION/COMPARISON. Corporate marketers need to know their competitors well in order to understand why a customer would choose their brand over another. Similarly, personal branders must know something about the other people that their audience will compare them with. Is there someone else who can better fill your personal brand audience’s needs? That’s your personal brand “comparison.”

4. BENEFITS/UNIQUE STRENGTHS. A corporate brand must offer specific benefits to its target market, just like your personal brand needs to communicate the unique strengths that set you apart from others.

5. REASONS. Why? A big name brand must have “reasons why” – reasons that convince a company’s target market that the brand can deliver the benefits it offers. Your personal brand has reasons why, too – reasons your personal brand audience will believe you can deliver the unique strengths you promise. What credibility do you have, and why?

6. BRAND CHARACTER. Every brand – corporate or personal – has a personality or “character” that makes it different from any other brand. Think about the difference between Pepsi and Coke. The products contain almost the exact same ingredients, but each brand has a unique character that has been carefully created by marketers. And that character is what helps you choose one soda over the other. Your personal brand character does the same for “YOU.”

COMPARING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND WITH YOUR COMPANY’S BRAND

If you apply the above framework to both your company’s brand and your personal brand, do they connect well with one another? Is your company’s target market of interest to you, and are they the kind of people you enjoy pleasing? Are you passionate about working to fill the needs of that market?

Everyone who works for a company is a marketer for that company. You represent the firm whether or not you deal directly with customers or perform direct sales as part of your job. The bottom line? To be successful on the job, you need to have a connection with the company’s brand, character, and mission. Your personal brand definition needs to fit “like a glove with the corporate brand definition.”

Let’s take Anna as an example. She had worked for 15 years as a corporate executive for a multinational airline, a job which had given her opportunities to travel and live all around the world. She had been very happy there until a few years ago when she began to feel uncomfortable in her job. She realised she was no longer content and passionate about the company, and she couldn’t figure out why.

When Anna sat down and defined both her personal brand and the airline’s corporate brand, she discovered that the two brands were out of sync. Her personal brand character hadn’t changed over the years, but the company’s brand character had changed – as a result of “9/11.”

Before those fateful events, the company had been a friendly place to work. But after Sept 11, 2001, the company had implemented many new policies and changes that resulted in a less friendly work environment. After evaluating her own personal brand character and the changed brand character of the airline, Anna realised that there was a disconnect now where there wasn’t before. This helped her make better sense of her exciting situation and helped her develop a plan of action for better short-term and long-term career success.

SIDE BY SIDE COMPARISON

When you sit back and look at the six elements of both your company’s brand and your personal brand – side by side – what do you find? How strong is the connection? If it’s strong, you probably feel great about your job and enjoy your work. If the connection is less than strong, what elements are disjointed? What could you do to make a stronger bond between your own individual brand and the company’s brand?

The bottom line is: Your short and long-term career success, as well as your overall job satisfaction, depend on having a strong corporate brand/personal brand connection. DO YOU?

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ised branding expert, certified executive

counselor, professional speaker, and author of several award-winning corporate and personal branding books. After a 20-year career developing mega brands across four continents and 50 countries for Fortune 100 corporations, Bence started her own company, Brand Development Associates International. Today, based in Singapore, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies on how to achieve greater success through creative yet practical corporate and personal branding. Visit www. BrendaBence.com.

Food affects your brain and body in important ways. This is obvious. What is not so obvious are the factors that influence your eating decisions. In the next Brain Bulletin I will tell you what some of these factors are.

In the meantime, for the next week or so, start to notice all the food-related decisions that you make. Pay attention to your attention. Be aware of your awareness. Develop a couple of theories. Also, here is a question to ponder: What would you do if the soup bowl you were eating from had secretly been rigged by scientists to always stay half full? In the next Brain Bulletin I will tell you.

Your brain has an interesting relationship with food. Stay tuned. Remember: You are a genius!

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

MYSTERIORUS BRANDERS must know something about your personal brand – side by side – what do you find? How strong is the connection? If it’s strong, you probably feel great about your job and enjoy your work. If the connection is less than strong, what elements are disjointed? What could you do to make a stronger bond between your own individual brand and the company’s brand? THE BOTTOM LINE IS: YOUR SHORT AND LONG-TERM CAREER SUCCESS, AS WELL AS YOUR OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION, DEPEND ON HAVING A STRONG CORPORATE BRAND/PERSONAL BRAND CONNECTION. DO YOU?
When you think about it, most of our time is spent with our co-workers and superiors rather than our family and friends. It may seem shocking but it is true. In our current career-oriented world where everyone is on the bandwagon to achieve more in a career, the workplace is seen as the avenue where one’s time is mostly spent. The culture of staying on way past office hours has become a norm.

When it comes to family, we are always looking to build and maintain good relationships with the people who are near and dear to us. We go the extra mile to ensure that all is well on the communication and relationship fronts but do we do the same when it comes to our colleagues and superiors at work? Many of us live with the assumption that we should distance ourselves from people at work and only liaise with them for professional matters to avoid problems and issues. However, is this healthy, especially when we are spending quite a large chunk of our time at work? Should we not be developing good relationships at work in order to ensure a smooth sailing life at work? Don’t we want ourselves to be loved by our coworkers, superiors and business partners so that they would want to go the extra mile for us? Of course we do!

Building good and positive relationships at work is essential towards the betterment of one’s career and well-being. When you practise having a positive bond with all in the office, it automatically works towards being beneficial for you. How, you may ask? Well, firstly, it certainly minimises stress in your office and creates a warm and friendly atmosphere. This is a boost to work well harmoniously. It is also the tonic for your progress and aim to achieve recognition for your accomplishments. When you focus on creating good relationships with your co-workers and superiors, it creates a comfortable ambience for all of your interactions with them and you feel more connected as you spend most of your valuable time at work.

As sweet and rosy as all this may sound, putting this task into action is a whole new story. It is not at all an easy feat for most people. This is because many look at their colleagues as competitors. Not to forget the other challenges faced at work. All these factors are deemed as obstacles towards building positive relationships at work and effort is not put into it at all. Do not get pushed into this bandwagon of thoughts. On the contrary, it is actually very easy to have healthy and warm relationships at work. It is all a matter of connecting to the various characters and obstacles you meet. Instead of waiting for it to happen, take that first step today towards building that genuine relationship at work. Here are some ways you can follow to get a head-start:

**MAKE THE EFFORT TO OFFER HELP TO THOSE WHO ARE IN TROUBLE**

It is a natural human reaction to avoid any form of contact with colleagues or superiors who have made a mistake which has gone public. Associating with them is deemed to cause collateral damage and these people are treated as outcasts. However, in reality, they often survive the ordeal and when they emerge out of it, it is always those who helped them and were there for them during this crisis who will be on their minds. Always offer a hand of help to those who need it without being judgmental. It could even be a pair of ears to hear their woes. If you are one of them, then you have definitely earned brownie points for your helpful gesture as well as gaining a loyal advocate and supporter for your career. And you may never know when they will step in as your saviour when you are in need of help.

**HAVE A SHARING HABIT AT MEETINGS**

Do not be selfish with your knowledge. In order to build good relationships, you have to make yourself known to others. Leverage on meetings and discussions by sharing your knowledge and proficiency and by displaying your individuality to others. Engage others in interactive communication as well. When they hear from you, people will start to know you and maybe like you more and see you as more approachable. By following these methods, you increase the opportunities to build relationships with significant people who you don’t know.

**PRACTISE PRIVATE CONFRONTATIONS WITH COLLEAGUES AND SUBORDINATES**

It is not always that we agree with whatever ideas and thoughts that are offered by our colleagues. When faced with such situations where you disagree with one of them in a meeting, try not to come out too strong and put them down in public, in front of the others. This could be very degrading and embarrassing for them. Instead, take the more subtle approach. Wait until the meeting is over and talk to them in private. Explain in detail why you feel that they are wrong. The same goes to treating your employees. If an employee has made a mistake, take him/her to your cabin and reprimand him/her in private.

Do not show your superiority by lashing out at the person in front of the other employees. This will cause the person to lose face and you will certainly lose all the respect and admiration this person had for you. The end result will be a huge strain in your relationship with that person which will affect productivity and work.

**ADOPT THE PERSONAL APPROACH WHEN BREAKING BAD NEWS**

In this current era of technology, you could be in the same office but passing a message can be done without moving by just an email or chat devices. These devices may be useful for passing menial messages but when it comes to breaking bad news, it could be a whole different matter. When you are about to convey bad news, it is best to do it face-to-face. Show your colleague you care by seeing him/her personally while breaking the news. This shows that you respect this person and he/she on the other hand, will respect you more as he/she will realise the importance you have given him/her by conveying the message personally without merely using the email. The person will be calmer in listening to your news and will also be open to listening to any suggestions or solutions that you may want to provide.

**BE COLLABORATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE**

Always show support towards the others at work. Be offering help when needed as it creates a good bond of trust between your colleagues, subordinates and you. Besides that, creating positive relationships is borne out of caring and sharing. Thus, share things with people at work. Get them involved in activities and projects that you are working on. This will make them feel appreciated and valued and instantly evokes positive relationships between you and the people at work.

Adopting these methods will get you nearer towards the goal of building healthy, positive and warm relationships in the office. This bond provides you with stupendous opportunities in enabling you to get your work done in a quick and efficient manner. Besides enhancing your work, it creates a harmonious atmosphere for you and all the others at work. Isn’t it great to have allies, genuine friends and well-wishers at work?
By Lim May Lee
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They say no man is an island, and they are right. While some prefer to work alone, unless you run your own one-person business, it is reality that many people really work alone all along. Whether you like it or not, we all have to work in teams at some point or another. However, while it’s easy to be in a team, it’s harder to be a good team player who contributes to the plan and communicates with the rest of the team effectively.

FINDING YOURSELF

The best teams have a mix of characters that support each other’s strengths and cover up any chinks in the armour. Is your dream that a few people really work alone all along. Whether you like it or not, we all have to work in teams at some point or another. However, while it’s easy to be in a team, it’s harder to be a good team player who contributes to the plan and communicates with the rest of the team effectively.

COORDINATOR – Dominant, accepting and committed to team goals and objectives, the Coordinator is people-oriented and a leader. The Coordinator may not stand out in the group, and isn’t known for being the smartest or the most intellectual.

SHAPER – All nervous energy and motivation, the Shaper is a goal-oriented leader who will “shape” the other team members, if necessary, to achieve the team goal. The Shaper, while great at meeting goals, may display aggressive behaviour while trying to pursue said goals. More than one Shaper in a team may lead to conflict.

PLANT – The Plant is usually a specialist and an idea-generator. Original and dominant, the Plant may take direct actions to problems and functions of the team and are generally more “big-picture” people, as opposed to detailed characters. Their focus on the big picture may result in a neglect of practical details.

TEAM WORKER – A group of strong personalities and opinions, the Team Worker is essential to keep the peace. The Team Worker intervenes with humour and diplomacy when tempers flare, and is good at motivating the others when spirits are low. They tend to excel at listening, sociability and coping with socially awkward people, which will contribute directly to better communication and a more efficient team.

TEAM WORKER is a need to achieve. They are essential in teams, especially at crunch time when decisions need to be made, because they don’t get swayed by emotions and can evaluate calmly and rationally. Their dry, sometimes loquacious nature makes them uninspiring leaders sometimes, but they still get far ahead in their careers due to their decision-making abilities.

Flexibility and Reliability

Things change all the time. Budgets can increase or be cut in half. Venues may suddenly become unavailable, the boss may have an idea that redeﬁnes the ultimate project goal. This is why ﬂexibility is prized in teams! Successful people roll with the punches and learn from the changes. Comfort zones, while undeniably secure and safe, are also restrictive and can compromise your learning curve. Grow onwards and upwards!

Reliability is also important. There’s not much point in promising the moon and stars if you cannot even get off the ground. Team players who are unable to communicate. Team players who make sure that their team members know that they can be relied upon no matter if times are good or bad. Stick to deadlines, deliver what you promised, and make sure your quality is consistent, and you could be in the running for the “Most Reliable” title!

Being part of a team can be stressful, frustrating, exhilarating and satisfying (when it’s over and you survey your results), not to mention excellent for your career prospects. This is where you can shine, and this is where fantasti c team players get noticed by the bosses, who can then hand-pick members for bigger, more prestigious projects. Work hard in your team, and your efforts will speak for you.

Lim May Lee believes that team players need great teams. Looking for a team? Apply now at mystarjob.com!
Simply submit your resume and you’ll be in the running to win a brand new Proton Inspira. Hurry! Contest ends 16 March 2013.

APPLE INC. CURRENTLY HAS MORE MONEY THAN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. IT COULD AFFORD TO BUY EVERYONE IN THE UNITED STATES AN iPod Touch AND STILL HAVE A LOT OF MONEY LEFT.

DID YOU KNOW?

A study shows that 80% of the top 50 game-changing innovations over the past century were triggered by people whose main expertise was outside of the field in which the innovation breakthrough occurred.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR PREVIOUS WINNER

Bangalore, the IT hub of India, has more A-Grade offices than Singapore.

According to Business Insider, China has grown seven times faster than America in terms of its economy over the past 10 years.

Bangalore, the IT hub of India, has more A-Grade offices than Singapore.

Business Wire reported that the use of social networks to render referrals by job seekers has increased their success by 27%.

The first hair dryer was actually a vacuum cleaner! Women around the turn of the century used vacuum cleaners as their hair dryer by connecting a hose to either the front of the vacuum cleaner which sucked the air in, or the back of it, which blew air out.

The first shopping carts were inspired by the folding chair and thus, the first shopping carts were called the “folding basket carriers”. The first shopping carts consisted of a metal frame which could hold two wire baskets.
Dear Careernomers,

I am in my late 30s working as a sales manager for a local medical implants company. I joined this company about a year ago. Previously, I was working with a multinational company from the same industry for about five years. I was a sales supervisor but I got retrenched because the company was dealing with a lot of compliance issues. I was not too happy with the company and decided to move on.

Currently, I am working with a startup firm of the same product. The company is quite good compared with my previous company. I am earning close to RM100,000 a year. Should I stay on with this company or move on as I am someone who likes to argue much with other people unnecessarily. I do not face difficulties in carrying out my duties in this present company.

My only concern is that I may have to regret it for not moving on to a bigger company while I am still young.

Thank you for your question. I will try to answer your concerns which can be summarised into two main parts:

A. Should you leave your current job which you have been doing for around two years as you are still young so that you will not have any regrets later?

B. To answer your question, let’s look at the good side of your current role:

A. You are working in an industry that is growing and with a couple that you are familiar with. It may be a start up but you sound as though you have much more control here than the previous company. Although it is a start up, business has grown and you have been paid on time.

B. Granted that there is a lack of job satisfaction in your current role; you should leave your current job which you have been doing for around two years as you are still young so that you will not have any regrets later.

C. My advice for the medium and longer term is:

A. This couple has provided you with a role, and they could have looked after you so you may be in a moral dilemma to leave. From what you have written, they seem decent.

B. However, if you do discover that there is a lack of job satisfaction in your current role; you should leave your current job which you have been doing for around two years as you are still young so that you will not have any regrets later.

C. Remember that a career is not just about remuneration and climbing to the top. Many happy employees retire at the prime of their age contented because they have built a good alumni of friends and colleagues that they can count on in the later stage of their retirement. I hope you have managed to deal with your doubts. Good luck and plan for that meeting with your boss. Aim for a positive outcome.

Nancy Lim

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

THE SIGNS OF A WINNING EMPLOYER

David Ong of Reapfield Properties triumphs over the drudgery of drug addiction in Dare To Fail

Get your employees committed to work by building a bond of trust with them, says George Kohlrieser in Be A Leader

Image Matters next week teaches you how to dress classily even if you do not have big bucks

Catch next week’s Top 10 as it teaches you how to handle difficult colleagues