Most inspiring

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CHARISMA’S POWER
To influence and how you can nurture it in your own life
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ARE YOU MOVING WITH THE TIMES?

VER stopped to ponder the incredible adaptability of the human race? Have we settled in the coldest of climates and have built thriving communities in the harshest of deserts. Our determination has allowed us to adapt to many different environments all over the world.

In our work spheres, there are constant changes to be mindful of. Beyond air conditioning temperature grips in the office (a common complaint, let’s admit), we are faced with different personalities, changing communication styles, cultures converging both physically and virtually, to name but a few. The world continues to open up to us with technology moving at such a quick pace.

The question is, are we “in” with the times? Are we adaptable and flexible in the way we work? Are we hungry learners, or are we people far too set in our ways to embrace the shifts happening around us or that happened 20 years ago?

Adaptability has implications not only on our personal relevance to our work places, it also impacts our personal career success and the performance of organisations. In our Career Guide this week, we talk about skills and what it takes to stay ahead of the pack. In our centrepiece pages, we list the top 20 career-related skills to our work places, it also impacts our personal career success and

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The No. 1 brain myth Multitasking can lead to task saturation for your brain. Pg 12

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Important tips - IMPORTANT SKILLS TO HAVE IN TODAY’S WORKING WORLD

Creativity
Think "out of the box" and find innovative ways to do things that may not have been thought of before. It could be a creative solution that increases productivity or that opens up a whole new revenue stream. Employers value people who can think of practical and creative solutions to take organisations forward.

Public Speaking
The ability to speak clearly, fluently and persuasively in front of an audience is a huge advantage. Don’t be afraid to speak up and share your ideas. People who are able to present ideas clearly and convincingly to an audience will surely get noticed by employers.

Computer Literacy
Knowing how to use computers, navigate the internet with work programmes such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint are a basic necessity in today’s world. If you are proficient with these programmes but can also learn new programmes quickly, that is a bonus.

Flexibility & Adaptability
With globalisation and technological advances, the boundaries of our work are no longer marked by physical walls. Employees who are flexible and adaptable in the way they function have a great advantage, especially if they are able to work with people of different cultures and are comfortable working in various settings.

Critical Thinking
Information is now so accessible that the question on people’s lips is no longer “what but “which”. Which is the correct piece of information? Which one can be relied upon? Employees who can evaluate and analyse information, and who can assess the strength of arguments, are important to organisations because they can cut through the mass of information and zone in on the parts that count.

Stay on track and stay on top.

Don’t forget to continue sending us your feedback and suggestions at mystarjob@leaderonomics.com. The Career Guide team will be collecting data and results from the conference. We’ll be sure to share them with you in the coming weeks.

Incidently, I’m attending a conference right on this very topic next week by The Conference Board in Kuala Lumpur. Leaders from all over the world will be getting together on 11-13 (we hope to answer these four questions:

3. What are the internal strategies for developing future leaders?

4. What are the tools in place to achieve this?

1. What is the future going to look like?

2. What skills are future leaders going to need?

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LEARNING THE ROPEs

Being able to do well and function in different learning experiences within the same bank also provided Liu the confidence to face and address the challenges that cropped up in her job. One of the defining moments of her first job was when she was chosen to be the emcee and programme organiser for a major event for one of Taipei’s major department stores. The Taiwanese conglomerate that owned Far Eastern International Bank also owned the department store.

Liu was related to be selected for the high publicity event which had the wife of Taiwan’s governor as the guest-of-honour.

“I was very lucky to be chosen from among so many other staff and treated it as a golden opportunity to learn something new. I believe my part-time work experiences which improved my personal efficiency, relationship building skills, and my experience as a secretary in coordinating complicated tasks and having good communication skills, made me a prime candidate for this role,” she reminisces.

To better equip herself for further career advancement and growth, Liu went back to the United States in 1995 to do her MBA in Finance at the University of Maryland and graduated in 1997. In 1998, Liu got a job with the local distributor for Kanebo Cosmetics in Kuala Lumpur.

However, the company succumbed to the downturn of the Asian financial crisis and was forced to spin off its business. Recognising this as a golden opportunity, Liu and her two colleagues came together to do a management buyout of the sole distributorship of Kanebo Cosmetics in Malaysia and set up their own company, Cosmetics Resources Sdn Bhd.

They grew the company into one of the fastest growing cosmetic brands in the country and revenue grew four-fold to about RM20mil. In 2011, Kanebo Japan decided to buy back the distribution right of Kanebo products in Malaysia and the partners were able to cash out after the sale.

Liu and her husband are now working for Kanebo Cosmetics Malaysia as the chief PR officer and general manager for business administration respectively. Looking back on her career, Liu says her first job experiences and job scope some 15 years ago had equipped her with the right skills and expertise to become a business owner.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

“During the first 13 years as a business owner, I was involved in all aspects of the business from sales, marketing, training, to warehousing. I had to draw out all my past experiences to make the business work,” she explains.

“It enabled me to learn new skills as well as to lead and motivate teams. We would laugh, cry and grow together. Most of our employees have long service with our company because we work like a big family. By the time we sold the brand back to the principal about 21 months ago, our team had grown from 50 employees to 150 spanning the whole country, while sales volume jumped 400%,” she shares.

As a company owner, Liu’s main responsibility was to grow the business and to provide strategic leadership direction.

“I had the opportunity to operate, grow, restructure, and even establish new departments. On the whole, I operated and restructured almost all the departments, except accounting. That area was too technical for me, and was better left to the professionals,” she muses.

True to her bubbly nature, Liu found her passion in PR and took up the PR portfolio when she came on board Kanebo Malaysia team.

“Taking on the PR portfolio provided me the opportunity to constantly meet people, make new friends, while at the same time promote a product that I am passionate about,” she says.

Her mission is in line with the company’s: “Bring out the beauty of our customers to make them look their best and stay happy so that they can spread their joy and happiness to the world.”

“It is my undertaking to bring that promise to all our customers,” she says enthusiastically.

Having experienced the best of both worlds, as a successful business owner and senior management staff, Liu says, “Life is full of surprises. It is difficult to predict. You just have to keep growing your skills and be prepared when the next golden opportunity arises.”

Coming from a caring family with two elder sisters, Liu’s parents have instilled in her the values to be diligent in her studies and work, be positive in mind-set, optimistic and to respect others.

“These are the most valuable gifts my parents have given to me which I think are more precious than wealth,” she says. Liu is not one to shy from taking on new challenges as she believes failure is the best way to learn new experiences.

“I believe in grabbing any opportunity that comes along to build up my skills to the best of my ability. This way, I continue to accumulate knowledge and new experiences that will be stored in various ‘folders’ that can be easily retrieved whenever the need arises,” she reflects confidently.

Her advice to the young aspiring workforce of the country is, “Every step you take will leave a footprint. So, be diligent at work. We spend most of our time and at work, therefore, it will be great if we manage to turn our work into a source of fun. A good way to have fun is to look out for better solutions.”
Leaders not born. We believe everyone has the potential to become great leaders. We at Leaderonomics have uncovered the science to building leaders. Leaders are produced through proper cultivation by being pushed constantly to break their perceived boundaries. At Leaderonomics, we can help you build a strong leadership pipeline that will bring your organisation and your people to greater heights. Our leadership solutions include the following:

**LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**
Over 200 courses which are crafted based on intense research are offered for the development of corporate leaders. All our courses are customized and adopt an experiential learning approach.

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Our one-on-one and team coaching cater to your needs and requirements and assist you in enhancing personal and team development within your organisation. Our coaches will work with your people to enhance their strengths and overcome their challenges in their leadership journey.

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Sounding Board comprises our global network of CEOs, functional business leaders, HR practitioners and academic experts. Our Sounding Board expertise include Strategic Leadership Development, Corporate Strategy and Management, HR and Culture Change as well as Talent Management.

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www.leaderonomics.com
EVALUATING values. That was the heading of an article that I was reading over breakfast at the Hilton, Petaling Jaya in August 2012.

Essentially, the article focused on the importance of evaluating the qualifications and practices of the person conducting the valuation of a property, in relation to its location and surroundings, and the planning provisions governing the development of the area. This is primarily because much of the decision-making concerning the property is based on the depth of expertise offered by the valuer.

It made me think carefully about how easy it is for us to place a high value on some things more than others, and to consider the judgment of those who determine its value.

While there is no argument that some things are more valuable and costly to pursue, buy or invest in, what often comes into play is the significance of the subjective value attached to it – how it is perceived through the “eyes of the beholder”, or the person seeking to acquire it.

In much the same way, the article was presenting a case for investors and companies to engage the services of qualified valuators with extensive experience and expertise.

I wasn’t helped to think that we – as individuals and leaders – need the wisdom, insight, and objectivity from others who understand where we are in our leadership journey, the direction we want to go, and the values and goals we consider to be of primary importance.

As one leader recently commented to me, “some people have read the menu, while others have eaten from it”.

This seems like good, common sense, but it clearly isn’t something we find easy to do. I contemplated this article having only on the previous day finished taking nine leaders through a two-day executive leadership development programme called The Leadership Trajectory Plan (LTP).

This programme draws together a comprehensive story of each person’s unique leadership journey – what has shaped them and how those characteristics influence their leadership today, helping them to reflect on the future of their leadership.

One of the participants, a global chairman and CEO, remarked that “this is the first time my leadership story has ever been captured comprehensively in a single place”. A key component of the LTP is seeking to align leaders’ motivations, values, and sense of purpose with their organisational, professional and personal goals. It’s not unusual to find these in conflict with each other. Personal strategies need to be developed to resolve them.

One Harvard graduate and lecturer Clayton Christensen co-authored a book called How will you measure your life? In the introduction, Christensen shares a story that reveals the motivation behind the book.

Briefly, he describes how after graduation, along with his former classmates, he attended a series of five-year reunions. At the five-year reunion, there was a big turnout, and “everyone seemed so polished and prosperous”. Everyone thought they were part of something special.

By the 10-year reunion, things had changed quite drastically. Some of the classmates didn’t attend, so Christensen decided he would call them. Slowly, he began to put the pieces together.

Among my classmates were executives at renowned consulting and finance firms like McKinsey & Co and Goldman Sachs, others were on their way to top spots in fortune 500 companies; some were already successful, and a few were earning enormous, life-changing amounts of money. Despite such professional accomplishments, however, many of them were clearly unhappy.

This led Christensen to question what happened between the five-year reunion and the 10-year reunion. Why was there so much dissatisfaction? Why were there so many family failures? After all, they all had a great education and it resulted in the careers they had dreamed of years earlier. What changed?

Only a few months back, I experienced this firsthand. I was sitting with a group of high-achieving CEOs and executives who shared their stories.

From the 12 that were present, five of them had experienced divorce. Their professional success had come at great personal cost, alienating them from the very people who loved them the most.

For some, where not enough time had yetapsed, the pain was still evident. No-one in the group was judging them – there was no need to, as they carried the burden of that themselves.

There is great wisdom in the pages of this book. Every leader and every parent should read it. However let me summarise some key points to whet your appetite:

- There is a big difference between “what” to think and “how” to think.
- Many never make it back from the path of compromise.
- You can’t have a meaningful conversation about happiness without understanding what makes you tick.
- How you allocate your resources, energy and time is where the rubber meets the road.
- Businesses and families are similar – we want our managers, and our children to make the right choices every day without requiring constant supervision.

In recent articles I looked at the five cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede, and it was fascinating to see two of these dimensions clearly evident in many of my conversations with the group of leaders I was with in Malaysia.

The first related to a leader’s future orientation (having a short-term or long-term orientation), and the second was how perspectives and outcomes centered around the importance of the “collective” society or the shared common good, in contrast to what was considered best for the “individual”.

Both of these dimensions are woven throughout the principles shared by Christensen, Allworth, and Dillon, albeit unintentionally, as they encourage the reader to consider the dangers of investing in those activities that yield the most immediate, tangible accomplishments.

Don’t pursue “the trap of marginal thinking” they argue, instead chase the most important investments.

How are you measuring your life and are you living consistently with your priorities?

Dr Glenn Williams is CEO and principal owner of Outward Looking International, an organisation that empowers leaders and organisations to grow their leadership capacity. To engage Dr Williams for special leadership workshops for your organisation, email people@leaderonomics.com
10 BE DIRECT AND CLEAR
Write an accurate job specification for the role that you are recruiting for. Be sure that the job specification is relevant to your needs. Do not be vague, but also be realistic. Emphasise what you must have and what you want. Identify which skills are necessary from the start and which can be developed over time.

9 GET THE WORD OUT
Host events, advertise in newspapers or websites, and also use alternative advertising such as signs, billboards or online means, to be seen as an engaging company. Spread a message of why it would be exciting to work for the company.

8 DO A QUICK BACKGROUND CHECK
Do a background check of the future employee before recruiting them. The resume that the employee sends might not be altogether true. Be broad and thorough in your search. The background checks should include the applicants’ education and employment history. Contact their referees.

7 PRACTISE DIVERSITY
People of different cultures and backgrounds would bring a variety of experience and perspectives to your company. Recognise and embrace cultural differences as something that can work to the company’s advantage.

6 DON’T JUST ASK STRAIGHTFORWARD QUESTIONS
Straight forward questions may lead candidates to give textbook answers. Try asking the question in a different manner, using an example or an analogy. Don’t let the question suggest an answer for them.

5 BE PATIENT
The ideal scale to gather candidates is between two and three weeks, two weeks to do the interview and one week for an offer to be made and accepted. All together it could add up to six weeks, provided nothing goes wrong.

4 CONNECT WITH YOUR POTENTIAL CANDIDATES
Enter into the world of talented potential recruits, whether it be at networking events, conferences, forums or the like. Take notice of the potential candidates and get to know them. You might just be able to land some talented people into your company.

3 LOOK FOR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS
He or she might not have skills related to your specific industry, but the candidate might just have transferable skills for your company’s use. Such skills are, for example, problem solving abilities, customer service skills, and the ability to work independently.

2 GET EMPLOYEES TO JOIN IN THE HIRING PROCESS
Your employees can recommend excellent candidates to your firm. They could also assess potential candidates to see whether they would fit into the company. This way, if the candidate was hired, employees would be more committed to help the new recruit succeed.

1 PURSUE THE BEST
Recruiting candidates can sometimes be a bit of a chase, as all human resource leaders would say. Some candidates may even need to be wooed. If you have identified a top candidate that would fit into the company, make an attractive offer. Good luck.
You never know when a crisis may hit your company. When it does, the media will likely come knocking. If you mismanage the media, you may lose your reputation, sales and profits.

Here is a crisis scenario that can occur in any company. Let’s say a female employee in ABC Company has threatened to file a legal suit against a manager and the company for sexual harassment.

Through social media channels like Facebook and her blog, she has commented on the incident. The negative message goes viral, reporters notice it and call ABC CEO for comments.

What should the CEO say to the media? What should the company’s stand be? How should corporate communications help in tackling the situation? Who should speak to the press? Why should ABC CEO communicate? What steps should you take to communicate a positive message?

In today’s world, you are going to have to deal with the issue sooner or later. Sooner means on your terms. Later means on everyone else’s. There also has to be some sensitivity to the stakeholder groups watching your crisis evolve.

A crisis can come in many shapes and forms. It can be an unstable condition, as in political, social or economic affairs, involving an impending, abrupt or decisive change.

Therefore, to successfully manage a crisis, the company must have a crisis communications plan in place and practice drills periodically.

If the company’s heads of departments and staff do not practise or go through drills and role plays in crisis communication training, then you will never know or learn how to best handle a crisis.

Some companies take such training for granted and say the wrong things to the media or put their foot in their mouth.

To effectively manage a crisis, you must have a trained crisis response team, a comprehensive crisis communication plan, and role play the most likely crisis scenarios through more training.

Only then, you begin to prepare for the unexpected. Experienced reporters should also participate and ask tough questions to prepare the crisis team and help them understand what a crisis is all about.

STAY CALM, DON’T PANIC

If a crisis does strike, take all actions to communicate the truth in an organised manner to the media in the short and long term. When handled well, crises can ultimately enhance an organisation’s reputation, and role play the most likely crisis scenarios through more training.

Firstly, you have to acknowledge that something happened, and you are investigating. However, assure the media that you will share more information on the incident. The negative message goes viral, reporters notice it and call ABC CEO for comments.

The other options you can legitimately use when replying to the media are:

- The case is before the courts.
- For competitive reasons I cannot discuss the issue in public.
- Union negotiation is on-going.
- Situations involving member, client, employee, or other forms of privacy.
- Employees have not yet been informed.
- Securities legislation would be breached.
- These are issues involving national security.

Communicate immediately, even if only to acknowledge that something happened, and you are investigating. However, assure the media that you will share more information as soon as you get it.

An organisation that communicates immediately has a greater chance of becoming the media’s main source for information during the crisis, and this will prevent them from listening to rumour.

If you don’t talk, angry employees, union leaders and rival companies may spread rumour and tip off the media. Remember, reporters need to gather information and get quotes. If they do not get it from you, they will get it from someone else. If there are rumour mongers, it will fuel even more negative coverage.

No comment” when a crisis strikes is a no-no. If you withhold information and if the media comes to know they will go for the truth and it may hurt you. Instead of saying “No comment,” coach CEOs or spokespersons to try saying:

- Yes, I have the answer and here it is.
- No, I don’t have the answer, but I’ll get it for you.
- Yes, I do have the answer, but I cannot discuss it.
- I am not currently at liberty to discuss that particular situation.
- It is against company policy to discuss ongoing situations.

The next step is to communicate the truth in an organised manner to the media in the short and long term.

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It was caused by two scandals. The first was an KFC employees. The social media disaster started when some manager posted on YouTube an offending video clip showing a KFC Malaysia employee tampering with the food while preparing it.

In response, KFC Malaysia reported the incident to the police and at the same time did an internal investigation. The video disgusted many viewers, and they voiced their concerns across the web.

Deploying Facebook and YouTube, KFC Malaysia’s PR team acted swiftly. The team launched a Facebook tab which contained two new YouTube videos addressing the problem, and set up a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section to anticipate questions that anyone might have.

In one video, KFC Malaysia’s director of restaurants operations made a personal public announcement. He apologised and assured customers that KFC Malaysia had taken action to prevent the same incident recurring.

It showed cameras were installed in kitchen and that they had appointed supervisors in every kitchen to supervise the food preparation. They improved their training programme and made it more rigorous to ensure employees understand the value that KFC places on food hygiene.

KFC was wise to use the web to counter the initial source of KFC’s bad news. The spokesperson gave KFC a human form. One area of control that must be asserted by the organisation is to insist that its spokespersons be trained. The task of the spokesperson is to:

- Take your organisation from an “it” to a “we”
- Build trust and credibility for the organisation.
- Remove the psychological barriers among the public.
- Gain support for the public health response.
- Ultimately, reduce the incidence of illness, injury, and death by getting it right.
- End with a brightener.

No matter how grim the news, try to end every press conference or encounter with something positive. The positive information has to be relevant and keep in line with the severity of the situation. Turn a negative situation to a win-win and make the news work for you in a crisis communication.

M Krishnamoorthy is a freelance journalist and crisis communications trainer. He works as the local coordinator for CNN, BBC and several other foreign television networks. He was formerly a journalist with The Star and New Straits Times and has authored four books.
1. **Communication Skills (Listening, Speaking, and Writing)**

Communication skills are perhaps the first set of skills that potential employers will notice from the initial moment you get in touch with them. The employer will be scrutinizing the way you behave.

By the way you talk over the phone, the way you give them information on email, your resume and interview talk, or the way you carry yourself during the interview, they will be assessing whether you have polished communication skills.

Make sure that your phone manners and written communication meet the standard, and take time to listen to what they ask (or read the instructions carefully), and answer in well-thought-out, grammatically correct sentences.

The way you communicate your thoughts should be impeccable, this is the way they expect you to communicate with colleagues and clients alike throughout your tenure in the organisation.

2. **Analytical and Logical Thinking Skills**

As much as they think a question/problem presented to you is a piece of cake, be very wary of providing the right answer. You might be thinking about the situation, then of all possible solutions, and if possible ask for some time to go and do some research to find out more.

Being analytical, but also being strong in research skills, differentiates one employer from the other. It demonstrates your determination, your ability to assess different scenarios, and your commitment to be 100% sure before giving an answer as to your employer. It could mean the difference between a bad outcome, a rich reward, and something that may gain the company a huge profit.

3. **Flexibility/Adaptability**

An ability to manage multiple assignments at the same time, effectively manage work under various changing conditions, manage priorities for the day, and work hard to achieve results.

In today’s world, a job description is very fluid, and can change from day to day. An employer that is willing to work in a multitude of changing circumstances is highly sought after.

4. **Decision Making and Problem Solving**

The ability to identify complex problems and make-related information in order to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions, can distinguish one employee from another.

5. **Leadership/Management Skills**

The ability to manage people is a very powerful skill. Not only can you inspire individuals to do what you want, you can maintain their progress in every step. Being able to lead a group and manage those individuals in a way that does not impede their progress and result their judgement is highly desirable in today’s workplace.

Employers will always make sure you have a good understanding of the work place, and their strong desire to let others do as much as they can themselves. It is essential to have managers that know how to lead and manage their teams in a way that leaves all employees room to grow or fulfill their own ways of doing things. Establishing strong management/leadership skills is therefore a big advantage in today’s workplace.

6. **Decision Making and Problem Solving**

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7. **Ability to Wear Multiple Hats**

Today’s world, where someone is offered a job, there is a job description included in the contract. In reality however, employers are not expected to stick to only what is under their job description.

On the contrary, they are expected to get involved in various areas of the business, understand all the steps and other when necessary. All the end of the day, employers look for someone willing to try out different things, and wear multiple hats at the same time, becoming a one-stop-shop for projects and individuals, and providing more than one skill contribution at a time to the company.

8. **Public Speaking**

It is important for individuals to know how to communicate a decision we set on an individual aspect of their business.

9. **Attention to Detail**

By the way you talk over the phone, the way you give them information on email, your resume and interview talk, or the way you carry yourself during the interview, they will be assessing whether you have polished communication skills.

10. **Self-Confidence**

Being self-confident creates an aura that some companies look for (or avoid) that you know what you are doing. If you do not believe in yourself, you will struggle to be in control, and you cannot expect anyone else to believe in you.

The distance and attention to detail may save you a lot of headaches and possible outcomes.

11. **Personal Ethics and Integrity**

Integrity and well-founded moral values highly irrelevant to the workplace. Even though many scandals appear with black hand prints, it is essential for employees to maintain their values and integrity at all costs.

12. **Creativity**

Being creative can be beneficial to anyone who may have to work in the workplace. It involves the ability to solve problems using creativity, meaning and past experiences, coupled with information and resources.

Using innovative ways to improve work processes and procedures in the workplace, or finding a new way to process a piece of work can change the company, turnover and cost, and in the end, even improve the quality of products/services.

13. **Analytical and Logical Thinking Skills**

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Being analytical, but also being strong in research skills, differentiates one employer from the other. It demonstrates your determination, your ability to assess different scenarios, and your commitment to be 100% sure before giving an answer as to your employer. It could mean the difference between a bad outcome, a rich reward, and something that may gain the company a huge profit.

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Being analytical, but also being strong in research skills, differentiates one employer from the other. It demonstrates your determination, your ability to assess different scenarios, and your commitment to be 100% sure before giving an answer as to your employer. It could mean the difference between a bad outcome, a rich reward, and something that may gain the company a huge profit.

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S social creatures, humans are born with the instinct to coexist and thrive within social groups. We do this by communicating with one another everyday throughout our entire lives. It is no wonder that communication is the lifeline that holds our social and professional relationships intact.

Communication comes from the Latin word “communis” which means to “share”. Although it is an important component in all industries today, communication has been around since the dawn of mankind with the prehistoric cave drawing. It was only in the later part of the 20th century that the process of communication was studied as a discipline on its own.

It doesn’t necessarily have to be spoken or deliberate in nature—it may even involve non-conventional modes such as body language to convey messages. For it to be effective, we should also take into consideration the emotion behind the information itself.

Communication begins when information is transmitted towards the intended receiver. It is only considered complete when the receiver has fully understood the message. How accurately the information is understood or processed ultimately depends upon how well the message was delivered and received.

By combining skills that include body language, listening, stress management and the ability to identify emotions and intentions behind the information, communication can become a powerful tool to help build relationships, inspire crowds of people and even diffuse problematic situations.

It even provides a framework for handling negative or difficult situations without causing conflict or damaging trust. Think of how a hostage negotiator would manage a hostile situation and you can quickly appreciate the power of communication.

While communication skills can be learnt, like a performance, it needs to be executed spontaneously. Basically it should come across as natural and as transparent as possible.

As many of these skills need to be internalised, it takes time to develop them. But like most disciplines, practice makes perfect. The result is you will project a calm personality during the process and will be in control of the situation.

When it comes down to communication, it is absolutely necessary to present the facts as clearly as possible so there is no room for doubt. This is especially important at the workplace where miscommunications can waste companies’ precious time and money. To avoid that keep in mind the Seven ‘C’s of Communication.

**THE SEVEN ‘C’S OF COMMUNICATION**

In essence, the information presented should be delivered clearly and precisely. It should not raise any doubts.

The message should be concise and short. It should only contain words that convey the information without “fillers” such as “I think” or “perhaps.”

The message should be concrete, meaning it should contain enough information and details for the audience to understand the whole picture.

Your message should also be correct in terms of fact, grammar and the terms used to address the audience. Your information should also be coherent, and should not cause confusion or misunderstanding.

It needs to be complete, with all relevant information included – contact names, dates, venues, and more. It ideally should also have a “call to action” statement that clearly informs your audience what you like them to do.

Lastly but not least, your message should be courteous to not offend the receiver.

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

This form of communication involves other cues that will eventually complement the overall meaning of the message. Elements such as facial expressions, body movement and gesture, eye contact, posture, the tone of your voice, and even your muscle tension and breathing tell people a lot about your state of mind, your intention and your attitude.

Sometimes what your body tells about you can be quite revealing to others. By understanding non-verbal communication and ways to use it, you can become more acceptable to others, to express your views more accurately, to tackle challenging situations, and to forge better personal and work relationships.

Communication is one of the most versatile subjects that can be used in different fields and disciplines. It is now essential in every segment of the industry and is in fact a vital component in most corporate structures. It opens a vast array of career paths to choose from and has become a popular course chosen by many in their tertiary education. Its flexible nature allows graduates to easily assume positions as university professors, marketing researchers, media editors and designers.

They can strike out as journalists, advertising executives, actors, human resources managers, corporate trainers, public relations practitioners, media managers and consultants. The possibilities are endless.

Communications studies usually combine social sciences and humanities. As a social science, it often incorporates sociology, psychology, anthropology, biology, political science, economics, and public policy, among others. From a humanities viewpoint, communication focuses on rhetoric and persuasion.

Communications can also be applied to outside disciplines which include engineering, architecture, mathematics, and information science.

Basically, communication deals with how we interact with others—it helps us connect with others and improves the way we handle certain people or situations. And that is what makes us human.

**ENHANCE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

When we communicate things that we care about, we do so by mainly using nonverbal signals.

**LISTEN**

Always start by emptying out all your pre-conceptions of what you know. Have an open mind about what the other party has to say. It may be hard at first but this will help build trust and understanding in the relationship.

**DO NOT INTERRUPT**

Allow the other party to fully express their concerns. Suppress any urge to cut in with your own. You will fully understand the situation if you let them finish and not “jump the gun” with a wrong or misunderstood response.

**AVOID POINTING FINGERS**

Placing blame always comes across as an excuse and will quickly alienate the other party. This in turn could create a wall which may potentially block further communication.

**BE CLEAR AND CONCISE**

Beating about the bush or sticking to generalities can confuse those you are interacting with. Be as specific as you can and leave no room for doubt.

**COMMUNICATION CAN BECOME A POWERFUL TOOL TO HELP BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, INSPIRE CROWDS OF PEOPLE AND EVEN DIFFUSE PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS.**

**ESSENTIALS OF GOOD COMMUNICATION**

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**REPEAT THE OTHER PERSON’S VIEWS**

Always repeat what the other party has expressed to ensure you fully understand their point of view.

**PROVIDE FEEDBACK**

Without interrupting the speaker, inject some neutral statements, such as “oh,” or “I see” to show that they have your undivided attention and that you follow their train of thought.

**SHOW EMPATHY**

Empathy is the ability to understand the emotion behind the other party’s arguments, especially when the topic is a sensitive one. By doing so, it tells the other party that you can connect with them at an emotional level.

**PAY ATTENTION TO NON-VERBAL SIGNS**

The body language of the other party will give you important additional information about what they are expressing. Sometimes these cues may even reveal a more truthful view of the situation.
The world may change.

States to share their experiences on China, Germany, India, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Spain and the United organisations search for certainty. And most visionary organisations?

organisations with a vision. They wanted to compare the experiences of managers in Asian growth markets with those in long-establishedeconomies.

Vision has many positive effects that managers in the organisation: customers, employees and shareholders. Vision leads to:

- Clarity in the organisation’s objectives
- Greater focus on performance
- More customer satisfaction
- More creativity in the organisation
- More energy in the organisation
- More personal energy
- Greater involvement of employees
- Growth in profit and turnover

Looking at the list, the effects of vision seem very impressive.

From the study they conclude that vision has many positive effects that create value for all direct stakeholders of the organisation: customers, employees and shareholders. Vision leads to:

- Clarity in the organisation’s objectives
- Greater focus on performance
- More customer satisfaction
- More creativity in the organisation
- More energy in the organisation
- More personal energy
- Greater involvement of employees
- Growth in profit and turnover

WHAT IS VISION?

Let us explain what we define as a vision. A vision consists of four elements:

- **Higher Goal** - Why do we exist?
- **Audacious Goals** - What are we aiming for?
- **Core Values** - What do we stand for?
- **Core Qualities** - What do we excel at?

By answering all four questions and looking at these four elements as a whole, you create a vision that combines corporate identity, mission and goals. You will have a complete vision that captures a sense of direction, purpose and belonging.

So, this one vision is the core of all activities, policies, initiatives and value drivers for an organisation.

This definition encompasses terms like corporate identity which Asians often use and liefbildung which is the common word in Germany.

Understanding the value that an integrated vision creates is like understanding the difference between saying “we are on a mission” and “we are on a vision”.

Mission is part of that vision. Being on a mission implies a current action with a clear goal and a deadline. But what happens if that mission is accomplished? Is that mission embedded? Is that mission embedded?

Being on a vision is the embedding we all look for. Being on a vision connects the past with the present and future, it connects the individual and group, it connects action and purpose. It connects people with themselves and with others. A vision is a driving force that connects us all at the same time. A vision guides organisations into the future.

Vision is the vision that we have to hope. Some say hope is religious; it is spiritual or emotional or just being human. Hope is a strong, if not the strongest, intrinsic motivator for people. Hope makes you tick. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to implement this elusive energiser into organisations? It will definitely have a positive effect on KPIs, return on investment and all indicators being used to monitor progress.

The point is that hope is not related to any organisational approach or model whatsoever. Or is it if there is still… hope? In fact there is. A company vision, created in the way we see it, is a means to ignite hope within the people in organisations.

Conclusions from the vision research

MANAGERS ARE POSITIVE ABOUT VISION

Managers around the world are positive about vision. More than 90% of the executives affirmed that having a vision is important for the organisation.

When comparing Asian managers have from a vision exceed the expectations of their American and European counterparts. It promotes unity, inspires workers and contributes to revenues and profit, they say.

But there are more reasons why a vision is useful. A vision helps you to create a “win-win” in doing good and doing well at the same time. A vision becomes apparent in tough times. It helps you create a sustainable, balanced development of an organisation.

Organisations have an inspiring vision.

REALISING THE VISION: TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

Asian and American companies seem to take their vision more seriously. They associate it with the strategic objectives of the organisation and use the vision as a guideline. Although, when it comes to communicate the vision inside and outside the company, all companies in the survey seem to have difficulties.

The vision is credible.

Nine out 10 managers affirm that the vision is somehow effective. And although there may be some negative effects related to the implementation or realisation of the vision, the positive results of a well-implemented vision are more promising. They lead to clarity in the organisation’s objectives, improvement in performance, increased customer satisfaction and many other advantages.

LEARNING FROM THE BEST

What can we learn from the best? The best involve all stakeholders in the development of the vision. Their vision is complete and covers more themes. And the best take their vision seriously and communicate it all around.

In a consultancy firm that helps organisations realise breakthroughs by inspiring and connecting people. For almost 20 years &samhoud has been advising companies in Asia and Europe on the implementation of far-reaching organisational changes with an exceptional focus on the human side of business. For more information, please visit: http://www.samhoud.com/en/home
By SU-ANN CHENG
mystarjob@leaderonomics.com

A university degree is the golden ticket – a guarantee, even – to securing a successful career, or is it?
While there are certainly good arguments on both sides, there is clearly a shifting trend in the job market where the link between education and employment seems to be breaking down. Some claim that education is not knowledge and that a university degree does not guarantee economic success, while others argue that the value of a university degree remains incontestable.

THE GATES AND JOBS ANALOGY
The spectacle of successful drop-outs like Mark Zuckerberg, Michael Dell, Ralph Lauren, Steve Jobs and Bill Gates must be scrutinised, considering these five actually started out in college in the first place. Without belting the idealism that persistence, determination, dedication and commitment can turn a dream into reality, the hand of luck, sheer genius and exceptional talent are also thrown into the mix.

The notion that only one great idea is all you need to succeed is, more often than not, a myth. While it is possible to turn an idea into a multimillion-dollar business, it is not likely to happen.

In reality, it takes more than just one try to make it and without a formal tertiary education as a backup, you may find yourself with limited options to support yourself while getting your ventures to take off.

Historical figures like Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Vincent Van Gogh or even Harry Houdini may not have finished school, let alone have university degrees, but times were different.

Success, in reference to these people, did not point to a corner office, nor was it necessarily a direct result of monetary objectives.

higher education still matters
There are many good reasons to pursue a tertiary education. It develops your academic knowledge, prepares you for industry-related skills and even plays a big part in the transformation process of a teenager turning into an adult.

The university experience remains an invaluable social learning curve as well as a pre-requisite to almost any job interview.

Paper qualifications, these days, are merely a rite of passage instead of a determinant that distinguishes you from the crowd.

Which university you go to matters. Tertiary institutions are now effectively a business, not to mention a lucrative one, which tends to skew the management’s top priority from ensuring that students receive extensive knowledge and adequate training to simply generating revenue in the face of tighter funding. The desperation of some institutions to solely boost enrolment has led to inappropriate grade inflation, incompetent faculty, less focus on the quality of learning and even bogus or non-accredited certificates.

Students should also research if a degree in their field of interest would pay off. Those who plan a career in medicine, information technology, law or education may require specific, professional skills and knowledge obtained only through higher learning.

As for the rest, many fall in the gap of mismatch between education and the needs of the real world. Employers often complain that despite impressive resumes and qualifications, candidates turn out ill-prepared and lack hands-on skills.

So, knowing how your degree can work for you in the workplace will enhance the relevance of your tertiary education.

A Good Mix of Book Smarts, Experience and Attitude
The 2012 Global Employability Survey by the International Herald Tribune had employers rank top universities in the world.

More importantly, employers highly regard a candidate’s personality, adaptability, ability to communicate well and capacity for teamwork.

The survey also found that 30.5% of the recruiters view professional experience as the one aspect which graduates must improve on.

Pursuing a tertiary education may be an added bonus, but ultimately, it is up to the individual to chart his/her own course. There are many ways to be successful and many career paths, and no clear-cut roadmap to get there.

If starting up a business is your dream, then being your own boss means not having to impress anyone with paper qualifications. But knowing how to run a business and sustaining it – whether it is gained from attending university or through experience – is undeniably crucial.

A degree is more likely to score you an interview and give you the leverage to command a higher starting salary. But securing a job does not mean a sure-win career in place. It is just as important to accumulate as much learning and experience as possible for continuous development and growth so that your work can speak for itself.

Bill Gates was a Harvard dropout.

The No. 1 Brain Myth and Why It Is Dangerous!
BY TERRY SMALL
mystarjob@leaderonomics.com

What is the No. 1 Brain Myth? Multitasking.

Reading emails, sorting data, and talking on the phone all at once clearly saves time in a crazy busy world. Or does it? Is multitasking even possible for your brain? Neuroscientists say no.
Here is a remarkable story about the myth and dangers of multitasking. Dec 29, 1972 seemed like a great day to be flying. Eastern Airlines Flight 403 was making its final approach to the Miami Airport.

The captain, Robert Loft, noticed something wrong. The landing gear had been put down, but the indicator light was not on.

Puzzled by this, the captain took the plane up again to have a look. No explanation. The first officer was called in to have a look. Still nothing. The engineer was called in. No explanation. There was a jet mechanic on board. He was asked to look. Still no explanation.

Everyone was looking at the light. And... no one was flying the plane. Lower and lower it went.

Captain Loft’s last words were... “Hey, What’s happening here?” Five seconds later the plane crashed into the Everglades. 99 people were lost.

Flight crash investigators determined that the crew was so focused on the light bulb that their brains became unaware of their circumstances.

As it turned out it was just a burned out light bulb. The aviation industry calls this “Controlled Flight into Terrain”. And it happens fairly often.

Most of us don’t fly planes, but we do lots of other things that require our full attention. Listening, studying, driving and operating machinery come to mind. Multitasking can lead to task saturation for your brain. This can be inefficient at best and dangerous at worst.

I will share a follow up Brain Bulletin on this important topic to you in a week. I will share some very interesting facts and findings that will cause you to rethink multitasking.

Remember. “You are a genius!” Enjoy your brain.

Terry Small is a brain expert who resides in Canada and believes that anyone can learn how to learn easier, better, faster, and that learning to learn is the most important skill a person can acquire. To interact with Small, email mystarjob@leaderonomics.com
HUMAN CAPITAL IS THE BIGGEST HEADACHE OF CEOs

TOP CHALLENGES FACED BY CEOs AROUND THE WORLD

By PREMA JAYABALAN
prema.jayabalan@leaderonomics.com

SINCE 1999, the Conference Board has been conducting an annual CEO Challenge survey with the purpose of addressing the challenges faced by presidents, CEOs and chairmen across the globe. The survey seeks to identify the most critical obstacles faced by senior leaders when running an organisation. A business perspectives briefing was held in Malaysia recently, led by Bart Van Ark, executive vice president and chief economist of The Conference Board, to present the findings from the 2013 leg of the study. The briefing also incorporated an open discussion on the issues raised and the outlook of the Asian and global business and economic scenario.

MOST COMMON CHALLENGES FACED

Human capital topped the list for this year’s survey followed by operational excellence and then innovation. The most pressing concern for leaders today is developing, engaging, managing and retaining their talent. “A year ago, it was the other way around. CEOs were more concerned about the economic environment. There were constant worries about how the euro might fall apart, how China might have a hard landing and retaining their talent,” Van Ark says.

In the current economy, Van Ark says that organisations need to get much better at what they are doing. Leaders are now focused on the internal elements of their establishments. In order to cope with the slow economic growth, it is imperative to be strong and competitive. He advises businesses to place more importance on value and quality instead of just volume and quantity. The act of producing high-quality products is crucial as it helps retain an organisation’s worth in the market.

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES

“The people factor is very, very important in order to sustain business in the market. Combining and working on intangible assets that include your employees’ talents and skills, organisational strength, innovation capabilities as well as your brand marketing will help an organisation sustain its productivity,” Van Ark adds.

“Besides these elements, it is also important to fully understand the gradual slowing in growth, and work towards adapting your business to it so that you do not fall far behind.” Van Ark asserts that now is the time to leverage on the culture of innovation and operational excellence. Skills of employees should be sharpened and leaders should partake in active engagement with their people.

Executing these strategies will definitely make an organisation more efficient and increase its business. “Leaders who engage well with their employees are looked up to. By communicat- ing with their employees, these heads are able to grasp the problems and issues that surface and help them solve these matters. This also increases the likelihood of retaining top employees without having them lured by competitors. Employees who are happy and satisfied with their leaders will be productive.”

THE CONFERENCE BOARD

As an independent and global business and research association, the Conference Board which was founded in 1916, is an organisation that works on public interests pertaining the economy. Its mission is to provide practical and sound knowledge to all leading establishments in the world, which will enable them to further enhance their performance to provide a better service for the society.

The board researches and brings together CEOs, presidents and business leaders from across the globe in forums and seminars, be it large, small, public or even private. Insights and thoughts are taken and poured into relevant research and solutions are found from there. The Conference Board deals with four main subject areas namely, corporate leadership, economies, and research association, the Conference Board which was founded in 1916, is an organisation that works on public interests pertaining the economy. Its mission is to provide practical and sound knowledge to all leading establishments in the world, which will enable them to further enhance their performance to provide a better service for the society.

The Conference Board is organising the 2013 Future Asean Leadership un-Conference on 25-26 June, a new type of interactive event, harnessing the value of co-creation and crowd sourcing to create cutting-edge research that will define the skills needed by future leaders. For more information, visit www.conference-board.org and people@leaderonomics.com

TOP GLOBAL CHALLENGES FOR 2013

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<th>CHALLENGE</th>
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<td>1 Human Capital</td>
<td>2.44</td>
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<td>2 Operational excellence</td>
<td>2.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Innovation</td>
<td>1.99</td>
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<td>4 Customer relationships</td>
<td>1.72</td>
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<td>5 Governmental economic risk</td>
<td>1.68</td>
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<td>6 Global expansion</td>
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<td>7 Global expansion</td>
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<td>8 Corporate brand and reputation</td>
<td>0.92</td>
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<td>9 Sustainability</td>
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<td>10 Trust in business</td>
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IMAGINE this situation: you have just arrived at a networking dinner. You find yourself surrounded by mostly unfamiliar faces. You’re here on a mission: to make new contacts in the interest of your personal and professional gains. Like your life depends on it.

It is an event packed with industry titans, important figures that you would consider yourself lucky to have the opportunity to rub shoulders with. You have prepared a stack of business cards to exchange. The occasion, after all, may provide a significant turning point in your career (if not now, perhaps later on).

This is your chance to make an impression and be remembered by total strangers. For some people, this situation is right in their home ground. They feel comfortable, absorbing in the moment to shine and are able to just charm the audience.

Think of any charismatic figure – you’ll most likely be convinced that the person’s presence can live up any room. There is some sort of magnetism to this persona that can captivate others, men and women. Think James Bond.

But let’s be honest. Not everyone can be Agent 007. Luckily, research has shown that you don’t necessarily need a particular sort of physique or even appearance to exude charisma.

Fortunately, in the book titled The Charisma Myth by Olivia Fox Cabane, Cabane explains that on a basic level, this magnetic behaviour can actually be nurtured. Charisma, as it turns out, takes in three forms:

1. DE-STIGMATISE
   Acknowledge and realise that the same experience can encapsulate you and has to happen to others. This nervous feeling is a common occurrence that we all experience as imperfect human beings. It is perfectly normal and is nothing to be ashamed of.

2. NEUTRALISE
   Now that you have come to grips with the situation, consider neutralising the situation, not suppressing it.

3. REWRITE REALITY
   The third and final step is to rewrite your reality. Now imagine you are in a traffic queue at a busy junction, and someone cuts you off as the light turns red. How dare that person!

   Expletives aside, your response would neutralise if you knew that the driver was rushing to a medical emergency. This is not to under mine your plight, but simply to attune you to the real and not the superficial. This is not to other you.

   Harbouring negativity can be a real drag to your personality. Of course, this three-step approach will require practice. Like all professional athletes, you do a lot of warm-ups to prepare their body and soul for the task ahead. Apply the same concept to gradually build up and enhance your personality.

DIFFERENT CHARISMA STYLES

It goes without saying that charisma styles can vary according to personality, goals and the situation.

In the book, Cabane outlines the four major types of charisma along with its underlying indicators:

1. AUTHORITY CHARISMA – Power to influence others
   If you are fortunate enough to have engaged the services of big brand consultants, you would have seen it all: well-polished manners (body language), bespoke suits and admirable titles.

   They have one clear aim: to project status and confidence. As they should be.

   These handsomely paid professional services are in high demand. Any less of a stature might reduce their credibility to deliver outstanding results.

2. FOCUS CHARISMA – Highly focused and fully present
   People with focus charisma are always listening to your dilemmas attentively, guiding you through the rough patches, patiently imparting golden wisdoms.

   Remember when you were growing up and your parents were always there for you? Or a mentor who has helped you through your career challenges?

   You can’t help but feel grateful for people with this style of charisma. They make you feel heard and understood. Are you looking to solve a difficult situation? Take a minute, listen to others, and understand their challenges. Your genuine warmth towards others will be a major likeability factor.

3. VISIONARY CHARISMA – Formidable belief system
   American president Barack Obama recorded major milestones during his 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns for rallying a nation under simple notions carded under the slogans “Yes we can!” and “Forward!”

   Amidst global financial turmoil, Americans rallied behind Obama, carrying the hope of fixing their troubled economy.

   Due to the Philippines’ high level of educational attainment, the country created 3.4 million service sector jobs between 2000 and 2005, many of them in IT or IT-enabled services.

   According to Peter Drucker, a management theorist, knowledge workers will have to be prepared to work at more than one job. This is because the life expectancy of a successful business is only 20 years, while knowledge workers usually work up to 50 years.

4. KINDNESS CHARISMA – Unconditional love
   People with kindness charisma are big-hearted. You might spot some in your workplace: they are respectful, always smiling, and one voluntarily offering help to others.

   People with this style of charisma are noticed for their approachability. They are likeable.

   However, individuals with this charisma style must balance it so that they don’t come off as too easy to please everyone.

   Being charismatic of course, does not mean that you will never have to deal with difficult situations. While it cannot be avoided, charisma can definitely help.

   The four different styles above can be applied as appropriate to the different situations you find yourself in. Project status, express appreciation, share vision, and show your star qualities.

   In an office environment, it is equally important to exercise this in person and also in communication channels (on the phone or via email).

   Cabane’s The Charisma Myth is a great guide to developing charisma, and I would highly recommend it to anyone interested to boost their interpersonal skills. Go ahead and give it a go.

   Charisma can be a powerful tool in your career to increase your sphere of influence and leave a lasting impression on others.

   ■ The Charisma Myth by Olivia Fox Cabane, is published by Penguin US. It is available at all leading bookstores in Malaysia. Imran Hashim is a talent acquisition manager with Leaderonomics. A self-confessed introvert, he considers Cabane’s book especially useful for learning how to create a lasting first impression at first-time meetings. To find out more about the Leaderonomics talent acceleration team, email people@leaderonomics.com

   According to Peter Drucker, a management theorist, knowledge workers will have to be prepared to work at more than one job. This is because the life expectancy of a successful business is only 20 years, while knowledge workers usually work up to 50 years.

   As the global economy changes, around 50% of those with the least qualifications will be working and 1 million adults who lack functional literacy and numeracy now face the risk of becoming a lost generation with labour market opportunities increasingly cut off.

   Life expectancy of a successful business is only 20 years, while knowledge workers usually work up to 50 years.

   Work that requires constant interaction such as public relations (PR), which requires face-to-face contact and business management, rose last year by almost 5%.

   Half of related roles require college degrees of some sort.

   Due to the Philippines’ high level of educational attainment, the country created 3.4 million service sector jobs between 2000 and 2005, many of them in IT or IT-enabled services.

   Active listening skills will get you hired in no time. We are out of 10 companies agree that giving full attention to what others are saying and only questioning when necessary helps in not interrupting a person’s speech, will likely land you a job.
WE have a panel of experts on career management, HR and office issues who will address your questions weekly. We refer to them as CAREERNOMERS — experts in career matters who will help you in your career journey. So if you have burning questions, send them to dearcareeronomers@leaderonomics.com.

This week, Bani Zainal, senior vice-president at Malakoff and Claudia Cadena, director, strategic human capital management, president and group CEO's office at SaparuaKencana answer Ahmad's question.

DEAR CAREERNOMERS,

I'm a university dropout. At 24, I should at least have had a diploma by now, but I have nothing. I studied architecture, but even though I dropped out, I believe that I didn't choose the wrong course. I still hope to get into a polytechnic or private college to pursue my architectural dream because I really have a very deep passion for architecture and design. I have many ideas that I would like to see take shape. I believe I can achieve that with architecture. I also believe that someday I can make something significant and remarkable in the design field.

At the same time, however, I wonder whether I am in the right path, as I'm already 24 and I will be 30 by the time I get my first degree. Is it too late to get a diploma? Is this a sign to just give up architecture and go into the working world with just a SPm certification? I know many people who are successful but who don't have a degree. I would really appreciate your help.

Warm regards,

AHMAD

DEAR AHMAD,

As with every problem, there are always solutions waiting to be explored, so allow me to share my views on how you should approach your situation.

It is encouraging to see that you know what you want and are passionate about. Many people at your age, or even older individuals, are still trying to figure out what they want to do with their lives and their careers, so you have the advantage of having clarity on this matter. Take advantage of this situation, and move forward in charting how to achieve your dreams.

If what you really want is to work within the architecture field, don't let the perception that you are too old to pursue your studies prevent you from moving forward. I suggest you do the following:

1. **See what options are available**

   Research and understand what courses, certifications, diplomas and degrees are available within the field of architecture.

   This will help you to understand what will be the best way to obtain the knowledge and skills required in order for you to fulfill your professional aspirations.

   A degree is not the only alternative. A diploma or a certification may also enable you to contribute and have a meaningful career.

   So, don't think that the only way to advance professionally is by having a degree. Don't limit your options. Consider all alternatives, and then choose the one that is most suitable for you.

2. **Find out how much time it will take**

   It is important to consider how much time you can devote to your learning. Are you prepared to do this full-time? Or do you need to do it part-time? Have you considered distance learning as an option?

   Understanding how much time you have at hand, will also enable you to know how many months/years it will take you to obtain the desired qualification.

   If you are financially stable and are able to afford a full time education, this will probably enable you to finish the course in the shortest period of time. However, if you are unable to study full-time, then consider part-time or distance learning.

   The outcomes will be the same, but it will take you slightly longer to complete the selected course.

3. **Determine how you will finance your studies**

   Time is not the only variable that you need to consider in making your decision. Understanding how you will pay for your studies is also important. Can you afford to complete your studies on your own? Do you need support?

   If you need support, then understand what options are available. Find out if there are study loans or scholarships offered by the institutions that you are considering. Find out if you can apply for a study loan from any financial institution.

   You may have savings. Ascertain how much of those savings you can use to pay for your studies. It is important to plan in advance, so that you know and understand how you will be able to pay for the entire course. Don't leave it to chance, do your maths!

4. **Understand how your studies will impact your life**

   It is important to be aware of the fact that studying will demand a considerable amount of time, effort and dedication. Whichever option you choose will demand that you devote time to do your course work, meet your classmates for discussions/assignments and study for your exams.

   This means that you will need to make sacrifices in other aspects of your life. You may need to slow down your social activities, you may not have enough time to spend with your family, you may need to leave work early to go for classes. There are trade-offs, therefore understand what they are, and discuss this matter with your loved ones and your working colleagues/boss. You need their support and understanding.

5. **Make a decision**

   Once you have reviewed all available alternatives and are clear about what are the ones that suit you best, wait no longer! Make a decision and move forward. Don't be afraid of being "old". There is no age limit for learning and wanting to improve.

   You need to be prepared to make decisions that may not be what you want or expect.

   If after considering all matters you conclude that you will not be able to study in the near future, then you will need to focus your efforts in finding a job that enables you to develop and contribute in the areas you are passionate about. You may need to start with a lower level job that only requires SPm certification.

   It doesn't mean that you can't work in an architecture firm because you don't have a degree. You may not be an architect, but you may find other jobs that will enable you to work within the environment of an architecture firm, learn and develop. Who knows, maybe with time, you may be able to pursue your education later in life.

   I wish you all the best,

   CLAUDIA CADENA

DEAR AHMAD,

Possess ambition

While many possess the right academic background and even strong competencies for a particular profession, many do not have the drive and ambition to take it all the way. Ambition is more often than not inherent, where you either have it or you do not.

For one, to be ambitious requires hard work because achievement demands sheer perseverance and dedication. An ambition will remain one until you work towards it. It does not come to you on a silver platter.

Perception also has it that being ambitious is being selfish and brute. Hence, many restrain their sense of ambition so that toes are not stepped on.

In your case, I see that you possess ambition and I sense your drive and motivation to embark into the field of design and architecture. Don't let any obstacles get in your way. Remain positive and focused towards what you want.

Only by staying that way will you realise your ambition to one day own your own architectural firm and design one of the most admired and revered structures in the country.

Regards,

BANI ZAINAL

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

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