WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

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Parenting & productivity

Victor Loh unravels the influence of good parenting on productivity in Consulting Corner.

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TRUST YOUR GUT
in order to make things work for you, says Sophie Le Ray of Naseba Group

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BEING EFFECTIVE
requires an equilibrium of action and reflection, says Be A Leader

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GUILTY PARENTS
and how to prevent lashing out at your children
I’ve been pondering the concept of happiness lately. What makes a person happy? Is it a lifestyle? Genes? Circumstances? Numerous studies have been conducted on the topic. Researchers have found that one of the core factors, or perhaps the most fundamental factor, that informs how happy a person is, is the quality of his or her relationships.

In a 2008 paper by psychologists Dr. Nanook Park and Dr. Christopher Peterson studying happiness in children and youth, concluded that happiness isn’t found in the absence of problems. Instead, it is found in a person’s character traits, and this is fundamentally influenced by a person’s relationships.

Positive relationships have a direct say in a person’s sense of belonging, purpose and sense of hope. These aren’t necessarily romantic relationships. It also involves relationships with parents, children, friends, neighbours and colleagues.

Our work relationships are a core part of our lives, but are not the only social connections we hold. We are brothers, sisters, children, spouses, friends, parents and numerous other things. We wear many “hats”, as we often like to say.

All is well when we can serve the various demands of these different roles. However, when the demands of work and non-work begin to conflict one another, this can give rise to tensions. Relationships are affected, bringing implications also on personal wellbeing.

This is especially so when dependants are involved, such as elderly parents or children. When we feel we are not able to give what all spheres deserve, we make the decision to throw down a hat.

Often, it is the Career Hat that is given up. Many new mothers, for instance, make the decision to leave their places of employment to devote time to raising a family. This is the number one reason women leave the workforce, according to a recent study by TalentCorp.

Sometimes, individuals happily leave the workforce. Other times, despite a desire to work, the decision is driven by the belief that there is no way of fulfilling both work and family demands.

The good news is that TalentCorp and progressive employers have been actively aware of this issue and are creating solutions for individuals that find themselves in this scenario.

They have been actively promoting the idea of flexible working arrangements, such as working from home, or having flexible working hours.

To create a depository of job opportunities with flexible work arrangements, TalentCorp has created a portal called flexWorkLife.my. In collaboration with myStarjob.com, there will also be a launch event at KL Convention Centre on Monday July 8 where you can meet employers and find out more about the flexible arrangements they offer.

This isn’t only for new mothers. You may be an individual who just wants greater flexibility in your work to spend time on other relationships, or to pursue other interests. Seize this great opportunity and get yourself to the launch on Monday. Read our centrepiece pages for more on this.

On pages 5 and 11, trainer Victor Loh and parent coach Zaid Mohamad zoom into the topic of work-life balance. Bi R Leader on pages 6 to 7 invites you to take a step back and reflect on what kind of life you are building. Reflection is so essential to keeping you on track.

I hope our pages this week help you along in your career journey. Remember to send comments on our Career Guide to us at mystar@leaderonomics.com. We always love hearing from you.

I wish you a happy and fulfilling week. Seize every opportunity.
I HAVE COME TO ACCEPT THAT I HAVE TO TRUST MY INSTINCTS. THE FEW TIMES THAT I HAVE IGNORED MY GUT FEELING AND TRIED TO MAKE THINGS WORK, I HAVE FAILED ON THOSE OCCASIONS.

LEARNING TO TRUST HER INSTINCTS

LE RAY BRINGS NASEBA TO GREATER HEIGHTS

BY ANGIE NG
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cken a leap from a public relations prac- titioner to head a fast expanding global busi- ness information group is no small feat, more so for an unas- suming lady like Sophia Le Ray. The French, who co-founded Naseba Group in 2002, has navigated through her fair share of setbacks before steer- ing the Monaco-based organisation into a business sensation that produces, promotes and hosts business-to-business summits, investment initiatives and professional training. Naseba oper- ates in Monaco, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Born in Nice in 1970, the Master’s graduate in Ancient History has a pas- sion for ancient cultures and contempo- rary architecture. Prior to setting up Naseba, Le Ray had over 15 years of related work ex- perience under her belt; producing and organising business congresses and conferences around the world, and in business-to-business conference pro- duction for a multinational business information company in London. Le Ray says her first job as a public relations practitioner for a French con- cert organizing outfit where she was in charge of the VIPs, helped her to learn about the importance of multi-tasking and working under pressure.

“Throughout my stint I met incred- ible people who are driven and talented. It was a great source of inspiration. Most of the singers and comedians I met at the time were extremely profes- sional and disciplined in the way they approached their work. I guess like pro- fessional athletes, the ones who are not disciplined are no longer famous,” she shares with mystarjob.com.

Le Ray was the chief operating officer of Naseba since its inception in 2002 and assumed the leadership role as its chief executive officer in 2009.

She has been central to the creation and development of Naseba opera- tions worldwide including founding the Global Women in Leadership Forum in Dubai in 2008. Holding the fort of a growing entity like Naseba requires a small task as it means greater responsibilities and managing the organisation’s operations and per- sonnel.

One of the setbacks she encountered as a CEO was when the company’s investments turned bad during the glo- bal financial crisis in 2008. Explaining that bad patch, Le Ray says: “After we grew the company really fast and took it public in 2007, we went through a period with more money to play than we were used to and made some wrong investments. When the crisis hit, some of the investments collapsed under the pressure and we had to restructure the whole company entirely.”

“On a personal level too, at exactly the same time, I lost a lot of money due to some wrong investments as well. It was all linked together wanting to grow faster than it was possible, and taking short cuts,” she reminisces regretfully.

TAKING A BREATHER

Tracing Naseba’s earlier years, Le Ray says the company started out small with four founding members and 60,000 euros in working capital.

“Our mission was to facilitate busi- ness opportunities amongst buyers and sellers within several industry sectors such as tourism, aviation and infrastructure, by providing exclusive business platforms for organisations looking to generate deal flow in emerg- ing markets.”

“We grew quite fast and within the first four years, our workforce grew to 100 across four offices in Monaco, Dubai, Bangalore and Singapore, with clients in 10 industry sectors.”

To cope with the need for more funds to support the company’s growth, the partners decided to resort to external funds and invited the “big boys” of the finance world to the table. In 2006, Naseba went public on the non-regu- lated market in France.

“We managed to raise a lot of money, thinking we could keep devel- oping at the same pace, but along the way became disorganised and uncoordinated. The management was over stretched and we were not developing in a sustainable manner.”

“Over the next two years, Naseba’s turnover grew by 200%, its workforce swelled to 250, it acquired other companies, went into joint ventures and opened three new offices,” she says. Le Ray says despite the dizzying growth rate, Naseba’s operation was affected by a disagreement between some shareholders who had a very short term vision of its growth and development.

“We had to make a radical move and were lucky to have a few strong shareholders who agreed with us to implement a restructuring of our board, company and growth model.”

“It took three years from 2009 to get back on track, with a solid team, product, client portfolio and vision that were in line with our business develop- ment.”

“From there we learned a series of very useful lessons, all in the space of two years,” she recalls vividly.

In 2009, Naseba moved its headquar- ters to Dubai to have a greater presence in the East, and undertook a restructur- ing of the company which led to a small group of shareholders and we, as a company, thereby delisting Naseba.

Since then, it has been focusing on a sustainable growth strategy that included terminating several ventures that were not profitable or strategic enough.

It has also revised its business model to cover a more concise range of products and services focus- ing on high-quality and value added services such as lead qualification, introduction services and private road shows.

Since its restructurisation, Naseba has grown by an average of 20% a year over the past four years, with profitability at the centre of its core was used to and made

Its workforce has stabilised to around 150 employees from 30 nationalities.

“Simply put, we are doing well. Thanks to an entrepreneurial spirit and a genuine passion for what we do,” Le Ray says.

BALANCING ACT

Having sailed through the tough times, Le Ray believes the failure has helped Naseba to check its course of what it wants to achieve and to stay relevant.

“Failure is a great opportunity to learn, become a better person or com- pany, and to move on. Without those failures, I would not have learned from my mistakes which could lead to an even bigger loss at some point per- haps,” she says reflectively.

Naseba had not come within a major restructuring but did it during a severe economic crisis. “Our model of development was proved to be right; we now have a solid foundation, the right partners, commit- ted management, hard work and a lot of experience,” she exudes confidently.

Le Ray has also learned to trust her inner voice, advisors, instead of brushing aside those gut feelings.

“I have come to accept that I have to trust my instincts towards somebody or something instead of pushing away my inner voice that may tell me that a particular person is not to be trusted or a particular business or venture will not turn out well. The few times that I have ignored my gut feeling and tried to make things work, I have failed on those occasions,” she states.

Her higher self-awareness has resulted in a better balance between her personal life and work.

“I take more time for myself and try to spend at least 20% of my work life to learn new things, attend workshops, read articles and books, and exercise new skills. I take at least a week a year to get away from work, and do something that is meaningful to me, like trekking Kilimanjaro, hiking around Mont Blanc or doing something on a meditation class,” she says.

Expressing her satisfaction with how things have panned out, Le Ray says as a teenager, her ambition was to have her own independent, something which she has achieved by venturing into her own business.

Crediting her husband, Scott Ragsdale as a great source of inspira- tion and a constant motivator, she says the duo work well together, and Ragsdale’s positive outlook and great determination has a tremendous impact on her.

“I am very happy with the choices I have made and the way my career has turned out. I truly love what I do and consider myself lucky to be working with very good people whom I respect and trust entirely,” she exudes.

She advises young people to accept a job merely for the money but they should also consider the depth of experience and the lessons that a com- pany or job will offer them as a person and as a professional.

Likewise, she believes companies with a culture of taking action, are ready to take risks and reap the conse- quences of their failures, and will ultimately fare better.

“Companies that are risk averse with- out having the resilience to rebound from mistakes and failures will not be able to go very far,” she points out.
A Leader Overcomes

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

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

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

Be A Leader.

We can help your organisation develop leaders. Write in to: people@leaderonomics.com or call 6012.343.7716

www.leaderonomics.com
Fifty years ago, Clarissa was a “high-potential” gunning for a director-level position in her company. Then she did the unexpected. She had two children in succession. “I was always highly ambitious. Even after my son was born and we were struggling to cope with two kids, I still had my heart set on that promotion. But as the kids got older, it became clear I couldn’t be both a star at work and at home,” she sighs. So she traded boardroom wheeling and dealing for PTA meetings and committees. “I don’t regret putting my kids first but I can’t say that I don’t miss having a career... I look at women who have it all and I feel a twinge of envy. How do they do it?”

**WHAT ABOUT YOUR 5-10-9 JOB?**

By VICTOR LOH

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A link has been discovered between inactivity and a higher risk for dementia. The findings are exciting but do not yet establish a cause-and-effect relationship. Ongoing research may lead to new insights and potential treatments.

**And how are the kids coping?** Well, the fact that Oprah created a show called Kidnapped by the Kids where kids can talk about their work-obsessed parents, hints that all is not good on the home front. It is a painful irony. Children feel neglected because parents spend so much time and focus (remember it’s not always about physical time, you can be at home but mentally and emotionally at the office) on their jobs.

Parents in turn, believe they have to work hard for the children and family. It is a never-ending cycle that destabi- lises the family and makes every member feel helpless and hopeless. If you’re looking for scientific proof, here’s one from Malta. A research study titled Experiencing Childhood in Malta by Discern, the Institute for Research on the Signs of the Times, found non-typical work schedules and parenting proxy negatively affecting children.

The study reported that instead of parents and children having lifestyles that complemented each other, children had to completely adapt to their working parents’ way of life. As a working parent, I can symp- pathise. My wife and I are fortunate to be in a position where we have the flexibility to dictate our working hours somewhat. But even that doesn’t spare us from the challenges faced by working parents! We often work late into the night because we want to accommodate the children’s bedtimes. I believe in situations where chil- dren are exempted from negative consequences, it is because one or both parents are making huge sac- rifices, like giving up on their careers or intentionally arranging their schedule around their family needs – which in turn leads to the kind of stress we talked about earlier. Not surprisingly, mothers eventually decide they have to choose between their careers and children – like Clarissa. At a time when talent is scarce, companies really cannot afford to lose their employees. Neither can they brush off the struggles working par- ents face because the effects cascade from the home to the work place, affecting productivity, quality of work, work environment, staff dynamics, and so on.

Research repeatedly confirms that when things are going well in their personal life, employees perform much better at work – and vice versa.

**SO WHAT WOULD HELP THESE DISTRESSED WORKING PARENTS?**

Flexible working hours, work-from-home arrangements, on-site creche, part-time jobs, time-off and extended maternity leave are among the common things that make the wish list. “I think if I was allowed to telecommute, I would have continued working,” says Clarissa. “I would have been happy to settle for a less high profile role and bid my time until the kids are older. At least I would still be in the workforce.”

But in Malta, expecting these options would be a tall order. Although much has been said about making it easier for mothers to rejig the work force, most companies still do not offer alternative employment choices.

“My company allows fathers to opt for flexi scheduling but the job itself doesn’t seem to support this. Plus there is a lot of social pressure and fear that it would affect career advancement. I mean, would you promote someone on flexi-scheduling to a senior sales manager?” shares a father of three boys whom I met at a parenting workshop.

And even when these options are available, the working parents’ dilem- ma does not necessarily get resolved. A study conducted in the USA found that even with one or more of these perks, parents still feel stretched. Are companies caught in a “damned if we do and damned if we don’t conundrum? I believe we have to move towards more liberal and flexi- able working options that will encour- age greater work-life balance – not just for parents but all employees. It is a global phenomenon.

But the reality is we are a long way off from achieving this. To do it, is not just costly for companies to do so but also requires a massive rethink- ing about the way people work and corporations operate. These things take time.

So while companies are not yet able to fulfil the working parent’s wish list, they need to sincerely demon- strate through other means that they care. Parenting workshops and family enrichment programmes go a much longer way with this group than departmental dinners, sports club and off-site team building activities that take them away from their family.

Be a partner to your employees at home if you want them to be partners in your business. ■ Victor Loh runs a kids’ life skills busi- ness that equips children with EQ, thinking, communication and learning skills. The father of two is passionate about spreading the message of posi- tive parenting with EQ and Mi (mul- tiple intelligence) because he believes parental involvement is essential in a child’s future success. He conducts free parenting talks and workshops for companies as part of his community outreach. To engage him for the benefit of your organisation, email people@ leaderonomics.com

**WHAT IS THE BIGGEST BENEFICIARY OF VITAMIN D?**

Neuroscientists now believe that your brain is the biggest beneficiary of vitamin D. A lack of vitamin D in the brain is though, is that many people are deficient in vitamin D. This is all around us, but increasingly elusive. You can get vitamin D from direct sunlight, or indirectly from the food we eat. But the reality is we are a long way off from achieving this. To do it, is not just costly for companies to do so but also requires a massive rethink- ing about the way people work and corporations operate. These things take time.

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**VITAMIN D AND THE BRAIN**

A familiar brain-food takes on yet another starring role! Fat-rich fish.

Fat-rich fish is loaded with vitamin D. Neuroscientists now believe that your brain is the biggest beneficiary of vitamin D. Consider vitamin D a stealth substance. It is all around us, but increasing- ly elusive. You can get vitamin D from direct sunlight, or indirectly from the food we eat. But the reality is we are a long way off from achieving this. To do it, is not just costly for companies to do so but also requires a massive rethink- ing about the way people work and corporations operate. These things take time.

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A few years ago, I heard about an elderly construction worker who wanted to quit. He told his boss of his plans to leave. His boss was sorry to see such an excellent worker go and asked him to build one last house as a personal favour.

The construction worker said yes, but his heart was not in his work. There was no passion left. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials, cutting corners to get the work done. Finally, when the house was finished, his boss handed him the keys to the house saying, “This is your house. It’s my gift to you.” The construction worker was stunned and full of regret as he knew he was sloppy working on it. If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently.

Isn’t it the same with us? Often we work hard but after a point in time, we dish out less than stellar performances. Our attitudes differ but we console ourselves by saying it doesn’t matter. But in most cases, it does matter. Each day, we build our lives, one transaction at a time. Each day counts as we build our life’s building. When I worked at General Electric (GE), people always spoke about the “house that Jack built.” Jack Welch, painstakingly, for more than 20 years, built the foundation of GE, then its rooms, roof and finally completed a remarkable turnaround. This took patience, time and years.

When we don’t get the promotion we crave, or we fail to get what others get, we are surprised. Could it be because the house we built doesn’t have strong foundations or good materials? It’s not just last year’s performance or last week’s deal that counts – it is your cumulative effectiveness on a daily basis.

So, how does one ensure that you are effective daily? Based on our research, it requires an equilibrium of action and reflection. While most leaders are biased towards action, the best leader balances contemplation and action, creating daily solitude for effective action.

### INEFFECTIVE LEADERS

Most leaders say the resource they lack most is time. But if you really observe managers for a day, you will see them rushing to meetings, constantly checking their Blackberry, dodging fires believing they are attending to important matters.

For 10 years, Bruch and Ghoshal found that 90% of people “hate their work”. Worst still, psychiatrist John Diamond found that 90% of people “hate their work”. They come to work to punch their time clock and can’t wait to go home. The difference between leaders who love their jobs and those that don’t is that they take time daily to re-energise themselves and focus through reflection.

### REFLECTION

The practice of reflection goes back centuries and is rooted in numerous institutions including the Japanese samurai. Ben Franklin, one of my leadership heroes, had a rather systematic approach to reflection, which was a fundamental part of his daily life. He developed a list of 13 virtues and each day he evaluated his leadership relative to these virtues.

A sincere examination of ourselves is never easy. It involves the willingness to face and acknowledge our mistakes, failures and shortcomings. Albert Schweitzer, Nobel winner, believes reflection in life is critical to leadership as it allows you to take into “account what you have neglected in thoughtlessness”. Interestingly, a key step in the Alcoholics Anonymous programme asks participants to make a probing and courageous moral inventory. Steve Jobs went to India to reflect prior to starting Apple.

In business, reflection provides an opportunity to consider the ramifications of the services they provide and how to keep raising the bar. Businesses grow when they look within.

So, what does one achieve by reflection and contemplation? Productive action relies on a combination of three traits:

1. **Focus** - the ability to zero in on an objective and see the task to completion.
2. **Energy** - the vitality that comes from concentrated personal commitment.
3. **Learning** - the ability to correct past mistakes and improve oneself.

Focus without energy results in lethargic execution or burnout. Energy without focus leads to aimlessness or artificial busyness. And not learning from your mistakes ensures you repeat them.

All three pieces can only be obtained through reflection. Procrastinators are usually people with low levels of energy and focus. Leaders with high focus but low energy never inspire and generally end up ostracising the troops. Managers with high energy but low focus confuse their employees with chaotic activity.

Reflective managers are purpose-driven with high energy levels, learning from their mistakes. They start their day in reflection to ensure purposeful execution and action.

### FOCUS

Confucius once said, “a man who chases two rabbits catches neither!” In Star Wars Episode 1, Qui-Gon says to the young Jedi Anakin, “Always remember, your focus determines your reality”. There is an ounce of truth in that Jedi wisdom. A focused person usually attains his/her goals.

At the end of a tiring day, if we focus on...
Learning can come only through reflection. All comprehension comes from a sequence of experience. All thought is an expression of reflection. Reflection is the basis of all knowledge, the foundation of all learning.

**ENERGY & PASSION**

Reflection generates passion and energy. Energy comes from passion. Passion is self-generated as you can motivate yourself to be excited about what you do.

Author Bill Strickland writes: “Passions are irresistible. They’re the ideas, hopes, and possibilities your mind naturally gravitates to, the things you would focus your time and attention on.” Strickland believes that only by following your passion will you unlock your deepest potential. “I never saw a meaningful life that wasn’t based on passion. And I never saw a life full of passion that wasn’t, in some important way, extraordinary.”

**LEARNING FROM MISTAKES**

Reflection allows us to learn from mistakes. We all make mistakes – I have done so spectacularly at times. We have all been in situations where things don’t go exactly to plan. But how often do we take the time to sit down to reflect on where it all went wrong?

Plato’s great words “know thyself” imply the importance of self-reflection. “We do not learn from experience, but from reflection on experience.”

Author John Dewey states, “We learn from reflecting on experience.” In fact, the Kolb Learning Cycle is based on the belief that learning for real comprehension comes from a sequence of experience, reflection, abstraction, and action. All learning can come only through reflection.

**CHECK YOUR ATTITUDES DAILY**

Living an extraordinary life is done internally through the daily positive alignment of your attitude. Your attitudes and the choices you make today build the house you live in tomorrow. Build wisely! Build with commitment, pride, joy, love and passion.

Your attitude is contagious and sets the mood for those around you. Your employees get excited when you are excited. They are energised when you are. Plato opened up the Academy in Athens at the age of 40, when life expectancy was 36. He ran this first university, training Aristotle and others, until he was 80. Pursuing focused positive dreams arms one with high energy and leads to an extended, rewarding life.

**I DON’T HAVE TIME TO THINK!**

This is a pretty common reaction: I don’t have time to reflect. Which begs the question: Do you have time to make the same mistakes over and over again? Or to remain unfocused, running around like a headless chicken? Or lack energy to fulfill your dreams?

I remember an old boss once told me that I was not paid to sit around and think. On hindsight, that was probably the worst advice I received. Leaders should spend at least a quarter of their time thinking about the future of their company and reflecting on the past. It may seem ludicrous to spend time reflecting but “real work” can only be done right when you know where you are going and have the energy to get there.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

If we could do things over, we probably would do many things differently. And better. But the problem is, we cannot go back. We are just like the chicken who cannot go back to the egg. And better. But the problem is, we cannot go back. We are just like the chicken who cannot go back to the egg. We have no time to reflect. We are just like the chicken who cannot go back to the egg. We have no time to reflect. Leaders believed that reflection led to productive and fulfilling life. And don’t say you don’t have time. After all, as Buddha aptly puts it, “All that we are is the result of what we have thought.”

**WAYS TO REFLECT**

By PREMA JAYABALAN
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REFLECTING involves pondering on something in order to evaluate it. Self-reflection demands a self-assessment of the decisions we make and the motivations we have. It includes identifying faults and mistakes, and coming up with ways to not repeat them. Essentially, self-reflection is an act of self-improvement. There are many ways to reflect on yourself. Here are a few steps you can take:

- **BE AT EASE**
  It is imperative to be relaxed and calm when you want to reflect. A tranquil place with a peaceful atmosphere is the ideal place for this activity. Any sort of distraction such as noise, people, or a crowded area should be avoided as it disrupts your train of thoughts. The best way is to take a quiet holiday by yourself.

- **LOOK BACK AT THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES**
  Relive your memories from the past, be it good or bad. Try to identify the reasons why you felt a certain way in those various memories.

This will assist you in putting things into perspective, and identify something that did not play well. It will also help you make your mind on how to handle your actions in the future and the changes you need to make for a better life.

- **LISTEN TO YOUR INTUITION AND HUNCHES**
  Your gut feeling always tells you when something is wrong. The reflecting process is helpful in enhancing your intuition. Through this improvement, you will be able to make better decisions.

- **THE MIRROR METHOD**
  Use the technique of looking into the mirror and observe the image that appears. Try to look at yourself the way others see you. Now ask yourself, do you like what you see or should we make some changes to make the person before you a better individual? Analyse your expressions, are they warm and friendly or are they cold and uncaring? These small details that you spot will assist in your personal development journey.
**FLEXIBILITY**

**ADJUSTABLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AS AN EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION**

The pursuit of work-life balance is increasingly important to employees and, therefore, a key priority for many employers. Studies confirm it, including a recent study by The Conference Board and the PwC Global CEO Survey.

As a result, CEOs are changing their talent management strategies to keep their employees engaged and motivated. In discussions on talent issues, there is often a hypothesis that salary is the most important factor driving employee decisions to stay or leave with an organization, particularly when it comes to retaining women. A study released recently by PwC shows that both female and Gen-Y employees value “flexibility at work” over “rewards.”

The survey shows that in terms of alternative work arrangements, the best organizations provide more opportunities for travel and remote work. In addition, they also offer flexible work hours and days, and the possibility of leave without pay.

**MEET EMPLOYERS WHO OFFER FLEXIBLE AND TIME-WORK AT THE flexFair**

**CONVERSATIONS**

Convergex SEA (formerly known as JPMorgan AMG) offers flexible work arrangements to all employees by creating multiple shift schedules for permanent and part-time employment. They also provide an employee support system to start with part-time work and to transition into full-time work. Transport is arranged and employees pick up points to ease commuting issues.

Last year, Convergex hired over 220 part-time and more than 100 permanent employees. Despite the fact that they continue to grow, and the trend continues as they reach new levels of revenue, in view of Convergex, extensive growth plans in Malaysia. At Convergex, we strongly believe that talent acquisition with relevant experience, knowledge and skills who have opted out from the workplace due to family circumstances should be given opportunities and the necessary support to return to work on flexible work arrangements, not the opportunity to return to full-time employment.

Lee Soon Fong, managing director, Asset & Wealth Management, PwC Malaysia & Singapore:

“Flexible work arrangements, which I champion and practice, are a key business imperative to attract and retain the best talent in the industry. As employee attraction and retention becomes more competitive in the current climate, I strongly encourage more women to explore alternative arrangements that will allow them to have both a meaningful career and family life.”

**GET TO KNOW DIVERSITY ADVOCATES**

flexWorld.my is born to build a network of employers who are committed to creating an enabling environment to optimise work-life integration and enhance employee engagement. A joint collaboration between TalentCorp and The Women, family and personal priorities.

**DIVERSITY ADVOCATES (R):**

- Sugumari Virunamurthy, HR director, GE Malaysia
- Uma Srivastha, HR director, Accenture Malaysia
- Nayan Tariq Abdullah, people director, Anheuser-Busch
- Tan Yean Peng, principal, Korn/Ferry International Malaysia

**OPTIMISING WORK-LIFE**

**flexFair 8 JULY 2013 1.00pm - 5.30pm**

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**“Back2work @ PwC”**

The Back2work Programme is an initiative under PwC’s Work Life Flexibility Programme aimed at helping professional women re-enter the workforce.

Experience required:
- Qualified accountants with two years experience or more
- Away from the accounting profession for not more than three years
- Relevant working experience in professional services firms

We Get You Back on Track
- Technical training in the form of audit methodology and updates on accounting standards will be provided.

**FLEXIBILITY WORKS**

Johanna Ramli, senior manager, Assurance, PwC

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VIRTUAL OFFICE: YAY OR NAY?

By SU-ANN CHENG
myStarjob@leaderonics.com

T he digital economy is revolutionising traditional business structures, redefining workplace dynamics and forming new corporate architectures. One key component here is increased Internet accessibility. In 2012, there were an estimated 2.4 billion Internet users worldwide, equating to about 34% of the global population (Internet World Stats). And with the influx of laptops and smartphones, there is now the option for businesses to capitalise on the concept of virtuality.

THE ANYTIME, ANYWHERE OFFICE

In the early 1990s in Colorado, venture capitalist and new father Ralph Gregory formulated a business concept that would allow him to work from home while still maintaining elements of an office to maintain a professional image. And so, the virtual office was born. The idea is simple: a company provides an office space often shared by multiple clients who work from home, wherever that may be. Services associated with the esteem of a physical office are also provided such as a business address, receptionists, mail services, fax machines and meeting rooms.

This has enabled people to choose where, when and how to work. Furthermore, virtual approaches to work naturally appeal to a wider range of people including working mothers, the disabled and the older generation. They are also attractive options to Generation Y professionals, who have grown up with technology, often favour flexible work arrangements. Indeed, the virtual office has the potential to be a highly productive replacement for current work environments. However, there are two sides to every coin as we explore some of the pros and cons of the virtual office.

PERKS OF THE VIRTUAL OFFICE

A business in a box

Without having to fork out upfront capital, small business owners can minimise risks and save a lot of money on overhead costs like rent, utility and stationery supplies. Readily administered support and services that come with a virtual office allow a business to take off right away, leaving business owners with much more capital for other investments.

Boost work performance

Given that a worker does not have to spend time – sometimes hours – commuting, and that he/she is not required to adhere to any formal dresscodes, it will likely decrease stress, sickness and absenteeism levels.

Geographical advantage

Without geographical restrictions, there is the advantage of servicing clients or getting in touch with consultants and advisors from all over the world without the need or expense of travel. An employer also has a wider pool of talent to hire from and gets to prioritise skills.

Improved interaction

Virtual connectivity allows people to be reachable anytime, anywhere. Clients can still be serviced from the comforts of the home. Email, online chats or telephone/video conferences allow meetings to be carried out immediately without the logistical hassle of setting up physical appointments.

Go green

A virtual office means less paper wastage and less commuting, thus reducing a company’s carbon footprint.

DRAWBACKS OF THE VIRTUAL OFFICE

Lack of direct interaction

Some clients still value personal contact and corporate chemistry. Face-to-face meetings and discussions are believed to better understand and improve responsiveness. It is also easier to maintain team spirit, loyalty and positive group cohesion with physical proximity.

Difficulty in managing a team remotely

The freedom, flexibility and isolation may result in decreased productivity if a person is easily distracted, not disciplined or unable to work independently. With minimal supervision, there is also the potential of deterioration of skills and quality of work that may go unnoticed.

Increased technical costs

Because a virtual office relies heavily on technology, a considerable amount should be invested in technical aspects, especially telecommunication. A virtual team has to be equipped with high-tech and advanced tools in order to be able to do their jobs efficiently, be it a laptop or more importantly, a stable and secure network.

Non-exclusive assistants

Often, virtual assistants like receptionists look after more than one client. The lack of attention or in-depth knowledge may lead to a diluted servicing experience.

IS THE VIRTUAL OFFICE FOR YOU?

The virtual office has reduced the need for physical offices or store fronts and the capital required to build or furnish them. This appeals especially to small entrepreneurs, B2B e-commerce and freelance agencies, where it is often a one-man show or involves very few stakeholders, to legitimise their businesses.

There may also be avenues for larger organisations to explore. The concept has also evolved into a work environment where people can work remotely and cooperatively from different locations.

Reuters’ 2012 survey revealed that about one in five workers worldwide telecommute. Moreover, with smartphone usage expected to hit 1.4 billion by the end of 2013 (ABI research), it is a clear indication that if the situation warrants it, we may very well be able to turn our devices into full-fledged virtual offices. The conventional notion of an office is no longer a precondition when it comes to the way we do business.

In Malaysia, women make up half of our population and the majority of enrolment in local universities but not all of them remain in the workforce.

Percentage women¹

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<tr>
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<th>MID-TO-SENIOR MANAGEMENT</th>
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¹ Estimates

Losses along the corporate pipeline

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Source: McKinsey proprietary database, 2011; government publications, literature search

DID YOU KNOW?
**GUILT-RIDDEN WORKING PARENTS**

**CONTROLLING OUTBURSTS AT HOME**

**By ZAID MOHAMAD**
myStarjob@leaderonomics.com

YOU have had a long day at the office. There are several deadlines looming and you are behind on your emails. The noise from coworkers, the ringing phones and the stuffy environment make you really look forward to going home. When the time comes to do so, there are more hurdles to overcome – traffic congestion and inconsolate drivers. By the time you arrive at home, your energy levels are running low and you are emotionally exhausted.

Does that sound familiar? Recently, I was approached by a working mother of a two-year-old daughter.

After a long day at work, it was late at night, and her daughter refused to sleep. The girl cried so much that she vomited. “OK”. The mother believes this is a fear response to her flash of anger. The daughter to sleep, she obeys and just says, “You cried so much that you vomited!”

The mother lost her temper. She yelled at her daughter to stop crying. The crying stopped but the mother could see that her little child was scared to see her angry. She even asked her mother, “Why are you angry at me?” The mother replied sternly, “I’m angry because you refused to sleep, and you cried so much that you vomited!”

Since then, every time she has asked her daughter to sleep, she obeys and just says, “OK.” The mother believes this is a fear response to her flash of anger. The daughter is scared of her mother.

The mother feels so guilty about the incident that she has had to call her close friends to talk about the incident. She is now aware that she needs to manage her temper.

Most working parents have had such a day. Most of the time, we are able to control our emotions and leave all negative energy at the door. We go on to enjoy the comforts of our home and the warmth of our family, waking up the next day ready to do it all over again.

But what about those days when we lose it? The noisy kids and the mess they make only add to the frustrations of parents who are already stressed. What’s the outcome?

A good yelling and screaming.

The kids scramble and order returns to the home. Everything seems to be well, except for one thing – you feel a great sense of regret for yelling angrily at them.

Many parents confess that it is a feeling that they would rather forget; it’s not a pleasant experience. It is almost like we have taken the easy way out and passed our burdens on to them.

The feeling becomes stronger a few days later once we realise the gravity of our actions. Their innocent and beautiful little faces further enhance the guilty feeling that we may have broken their hearts.

**EFFECTS OF YELLING**

Screaming, yelling and nagging are the fastest ways to break their hearts. This is because, in that short moment, we lose control of our words. Usually, the ones that come out from our mouths in that moment are all negative.

If we do it too many times, it is highly likely that long-term relationships can be severely damaged.

In addition, guilt-ridden and regretful parents could also be feeling an urge to “make it up” by spending money on their kids. While showering our loved ones with gifts is a noble act, doing so out of regret may send a wrong signal to the kids. They may think that it is all right to lose control as long as we compensate them later with material items.

**BE IN CONTROL**

How then can we be more in control of our emotions? The answer lies in our efforts to prevent those incidences.

Firstly, we can prevent our own emotions from getting the better of us. Throw all negative energy away when you arrive home. In our system, we can focus on being the best parents that we can be and look back at the years with a lot of smiles rather than regrets.

At home, the family can also create the basic house rules together. These may include personal responsibilities to put toys away after playing, clean up their own mess as well as to eat and go to bed on time.

Are you keeping your stakeholders happy?

By EVA CHRISTODOULOU
eva.christodoulou@leaderonomics.com

WHO are your stakeholders and how are you managing them?

Just like a firm has a responsibility towards its stakeholders, we similarly have a responsibility towards our own network of individuals and entities.

They may be our boss, colleagues, employees, family, friends, community, even our fan base. The list could go on, and naturally differs for each individual.

To maintain a position of favor with these stakeholders, one needs to balance the responsibilities towards the different groups. This balancing act is not an easy feat, as many can easily agree. Please both a boss and family can be tricky enough. Let’s also not forget the need to give ourselves some attention and down-time.

Make time to sit down and identify your stakeholders. Who are they, and what it is that they expect from you? Make a list of these expectations and check which ones you are currently meeting, and which you still need to work on.

Priorise your stakeholders. Whose expectations and needs come first? It is difficult to choose which of these ‘expectations’ you should aim to meet first, but once you are true to yourself about who/what is important to you, it will make it easier for you to come up with an action plan and stick to it.

This ranking method is not easy; however it can help you prioritise your actions according to the most important things in your life. Investing some time to think through things can have a huge payback in ways most meaningful to you. Take the time to think about your stakeholders!

Eva Christodoulou hopes that everyone finds a way to live a balanced, healthy life, keeping both career and personal fronts strong and stellar.
TOP 10
WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

10. **DON’T COMPLAIN**
There is nothing more unappealing than a person who constantly complains and whines about everything. A complainer is always viewed negatively. If you have to verbalise your dissatisfaction, save it for the appropriate route: either a person in charge, privately to your close family and friends, or your journal. You don’t want to be labeled as the office brat. Nobody likes a brat.

9. **PUT YOURSELF IN THE SHOES OF OTHERS**
It is easier to connect with people if you understand them better. There may be a reason why your graphic designer or operations manager always looks so gloomy. Take time to talk to them and try seeing things from their perspective.

8. **IGNITE LAUGHTER**
Don’t be afraid to be funny in front of your co-workers. Feel free to laugh at situations and make witty jokes. Use your humour to lower barriers and get people to be more comfortable with each other. Just make sure that your jokes are not inappropriate or harmful.

7. **COMMUNICATE CLEARLY**
Don’t overuse metaphors or Shakespearean language to communicate. Be clear about the message you want to convey. Always think before you respond to anything, especially in company or client meetings. Don’t just blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. Construct your ideas in a proper and effective manner.

6. **LISTEN CAREFULLY**
Listen actively to what your colleagues have to say and be open to other people’s opinions and ideas. Being a good listener shows that you hear and acknowledge other people’s perspectives. Listening actively shows others that you are genuine, and they will feel more connected to you.

5. **PROMOTE TOGETHERNESS**
Create environments that are friendly and warm to encourage togetherness among co-workers. Treat everyone equally, and give everyone a chance to speak up in the office. Don’t play favourites or get into cliques.

4. **SETTLE DISPUTES FITTINGLY**
When someone is being problematic, don’t bring it up in front of the whole office. Speak to him or her personally and explain to them why you disagree with their actions. The worst thing to do is to speak about it to other colleagues behind their back.

3. **BE CONSIDERATE**
Be aware of what is happening with your co-workers. Take note of birthdays and happy events in their life. Be sure to congratulate them. Also remember to show compassion and empathy when a colleague is going through a difficult time. Simple gestures show that you are concerned and you care about the people around you.

2. **SHOW APPRECIATION**
Appreciate the hard work and efforts made by your team members. Say “thank you” and acknowledge the good work that they have done. Be generous with praises and kind words to your colleagues. Always point out the positive values.

1. **PUT ON A BIG, HAPPY SMILE!**
Maintain a cheerful and positive attitude. Greet your colleagues with a smile when you see them. This will make them feel that you are approachable and they will become more comfortable around you. As they say, a simple smile can brighten up a person’s day.
As these nations, such as China and Russia, shadow market is the nations that come of not just one nation, but many. US interest rates will rise and its economy United States will not have the resources to financing capability of these nations, the are said to be dire, yet there is nothing any idea what is happening until after the are often executed in foreign countries and market is not regulated because its deals are huge tracts of farmlands to gain access stakes of multinational companies as well are quietly controlling capital markets, are financial vehicles such as hedge funds, stocks, bonds, real estate and currencies. As for the oil-rich Middle East, a lot of Other than the capital markets, nations diversifying their economies away from oil. While the West is burning cash and consuming resources, nations in the East have the money and the natu-

**FLIGHT OF TALENTS**

Being deeply in debt and heavily reliant on oil to power its enormous economy, the United States is losing its power. But, if that is not enough, it is also encounter- ing another loss—the flight of its shrewdest financial talents to nations of the shadow market.

A report by Chicago management employment firm Hedricks & Strategies reveals that the shock- ing employment trends in the financial industry in 2009—that Western investment professionals are rapidly moving to international foreign wealth funds. Chinese financial firms, for instance, have been holding recruit- ment sessions in New York, hiring workers with investment experiences. Some of the Gulf sovereign funds, meanwhile, require that all of their members have previous working experience with Western hedge funds or private equity funds. More worryingly, many Western pro- fessionals are supplying the models for wealthy nations to use. They are giving the shadow market the Western game plan.

Nations of the shadow market do realise that it is not easy to successfully invest bil- lions, if not trillions, of dollars in a financial market. Take on too much risk and they could squander the whole nest egg. Invest too conservatively and they could miss out the returns that their rivals are making. Therefore, besides hiring Western finan- cial talent, they are also buying sizable stakes in companies that own some of the most prestigious private equity. The Chinese, for example, have invested sig-

**MONEY IS A WEAPON**

The pile of cash that nations of the shadow market have is the basis for power because it provides liquidity, which is the key to a functioning market. Looking back more than a century ago, nearly every world financial crisis has been caused by a sudden lack of liquidity.

At that point, banks and other financial companies tend to hoard cash rather than loan- ing or investing it. This severe shortage in cash slows down economic activities. In the mod-

Looking back more than a decade, the United States has dominated the world politi- cally, commercially and financially. However, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, it is no longer the most potent financial superpower. The crisis has exposed Wall Street’s greed and its resilience to abide by the law. Most importantly, this crisis and the ensuing rescue efforts have cost the United States hundreds of billions of dollars, depleting the nation’s resources and making it the biggest debtor in the world.

With its massive borrowing from other nations, it is at risk of losing its financial might and reputation as keeper of the world’s currency—the dollar. A small sale order of US dollars from China, for instance, will cause the value of the dollar to plum- met.

The crisis has also shaken investors’ confidence across the globe, tarnishing America’s reputation as a moneymak- ing wonderland. More importantly, it has obliquely altered the rules of the geo- politico game and the change of controlling hands from the West to the East. This change is the result of a shift in wealth. But this shift does not take place in a market. Unlike warfare, it has no formal leadership as to which nation is allying with which or which nation is leading which. Rather, it is a collection of unaffiliated nations that effectively run the interna- tional economy through their staggering cash reserves and prodigious holdings of stocks, bonds, real estate and currencies.

These nations are extremely wealthy and their wealth is held in largely unregulated financial vehicles such as hedge funds, private equity funds, government-run sov- ereign wealth funds, as well as vast govern- ment-owned holding companies.

In great speed and secrecy, these funds are quietly controlling capital markets, snapping strategic real estates and buying stakes of multinational companies as well as huge tracts of farmlands to gain access to food supplies.

These flush cash nations are China, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Norway and the “market” through which they trade, invest and purchase is called the shadow market. The shadow market is not regulated because its deals are often executed in foreign countries and are therefore cloaked under different finan- cial rules of each country. So, nobody has any idea what is happening until after the deals have materialised.

The underlying objectives of these deals may not seem significant on the onset, but may threaten other countries in the long run. The consequences, when they surface, are said to be dire, yet there is nothing any one can do about it.

The United States, in particular, cannot prevent the emergence of the shadow mar- ket because it is through this market that the country can obtain money to quench its ever-growing thirst to spend. Without the financing capability of these nations, the United States will not have the resources to finance its spending.

As a result, the US dollar will fall sharply. US interest rates will rise and unemployment will suffer. All these effects, in turn, will rip- ple across the globe, hurting the economy of just one nation: the United States.

Another aspect, a dangerous one, of the shadow market is the nations that com- prise it. These nations are generally not eco- nomically and politically neutral, neither are they friendly to the Western world.

The most unstable shadow mar- ket perilous, as wealth is often used as a powerful and effective weapon to exert financial leverage to achieve political ends. As these nations, such as China and Russia, become richer, they are also becoming increas- ingly aggressive and uncompromising, ignor- ing requests from the United States and other Western nations at best and intervening in their policies at worst.

The shadow market exists and there is no way of stopping it from growing. These ‘sexy’ peri’s and fears that it creates have never been truer than today. Hence, everyone must be aware of them.

Hedge funds and private equity funds that capitalise on complicated trading techniques in search for a small margin of profits. They are owned by ultra secretive firms such as the Blackstone Group and are designed to take over businesses at bargain prices, tidy them up and sell them at decent profits.

As of July 2010, these funds controlled more than US$4 trillion in assets. The capi- tal, coupled with the funds’ sophisticated investment techniques, have been giving them a level of influence far beyond imagi-

One will only have to think of the 1997 Asian currency crisis and George Soros in order to conjure up the power these funds possess.

With hedge funds and private equity funds actively trading in it, the shadow market is inevitably going to be the most powerful financial force on the surface of the earth, if it isn’t already.

Other than the capital markets, nations of the shadow market are also paying at the economies, too. China, for instance, is striking deals with oil-and-gas-producing countries such as Russia and Venezuela to give the Chinese people exclusive access to the needed reserves.

As for the oil-rich Middle East, a lot of the Gulf States are using their cash to get no-oil businesses up and running, smartly

By Koh Eam Soo & Team

myStarjob.com, Saturday 6 July 2013

In this week's Learning From Books: Koh and his team summarise The Shadow Market by Eric J. Weiner.
What do you think are the three main contributing factors to women being under-represented in senior management positions in Malaysia?

![Bar chart showing the percentage of women (Female) and men (Male) facing various challenges in the workplace.]

**Lack of social acceptance for women occupying leadership roles:**
- Male: 47%
- Female: 76%

**Male-dominated work environment:**
- Male: 37%
- Female: 43%

**Inflexible work arrangements:**
- Male: 45%
- Female: 45%

**Inflexible childcare support:**
- Male: 22%
- Female: 30%

**Lack of ambition:**
- Male: 23%
- Female: 21%

**Pay inequity:**
- Male: 16%
- Female: 23%

**Lack of access to right networks:**
- Male: 10%
- Female: 4%

**Others:**
- Male: 4%
- Female: 7%

**Source:**
Failing Forward

1. Lack of commitment
To start off, they may not be 100% committed to what they are doing. When that happens, it is easy to lose the momentum to move forward. To drive a plan or idea towards success, it needs passion and inspiration.

2. Not learning from past mistakes
Another reason how people end up failing is when they do not learn from their mistakes. In order to move forward there are certain lessons we need to learn that will allow us to choose the correct path towards success. As difficult as learning through impact is—for example when faced with failure—for most people, it is still the more effective way to learn than learning through books or from another person.

3. Giving up
And that leads to the next point that people who do not succeed tend to be less persistent or resilient in achieving their goals. There is little reason to go on if they feel that they do not have the capacity to push their ideas on to the world. Giving up is usually the result of a setback. If they ended up obsessing about these setbacks they experienced, they may risk getting “stuck in a rut” with no way of getting out of that stagnation.

4. Lack of conviction
Sometimes people are not that persistent because they lack the confidence or conviction. People like this prefer to blend into their surroundings instead of standing out and making a difference. They would prefer to follow than be followed hence they would never know the responsibility of striving for success.

5. Lack of discipline
People who fail typically also do not have the self-discipline to keep on chasing their dreams. Discipline helps a person to stay focused and to ignore distractions. In order to inculcate discipline, the person has to have a good amount of self-control and a willingness to sacrifice their time and sometimes happiness in order to achieve a much fuller satisfaction later.

6. Low self-esteem
A person’s self-esteem is another determinant of whether a person fails or succeeds. The lack of self-esteem usually stems from the life experiences that mould the self with unfavourable and develop negative feelings of self-worth.

In such a case, failure to them is seen as part of life and because of that they do not analyse where they went wrong and are bound to repeat their mistakes. A failure, big as it seems, is never a failure itself will make perfect sense. As difficult as learning through impact is for example when faced with failure— for most people, it is still the more effective way to learn than learning through books or from another person.

In that sense, being unsuccessful becomes a powerful way for us to learn the best way to do something. Some of these lessons can quickly be picked up, some are just too complex and need constant trial and error and an unwavering persistence to grasp it.

3. Giving up
And that leads to the next point that people who do not succeed tend to be less persistent or resilient in achieving their goals. There is little reason to go on if they feel that they do not have the capacity to push their ideas on to the world. Giving up is usually the result of a setback.

If they ended up obsessing about these setbacks they experienced, they may risk getting “stuck in a rut” with no way of getting out of that stagnation.

4. Lack of conviction
Sometimes people are not that persistent because they lack the confidence or conviction. People like this prefer to blend into their surroundings instead of standing out and making a difference. They would prefer to follow than be followed hence they would never know the responsibility of striving for success.

People who fail also are usually the ones who would seek to deflect the blame from themselves. When failure strikes, they very quickly rationalise the reasons why they were doomed to fail, rather than analysing where the problems lie.

5. Lack of discipline
People who fail often usually also do not have the self-discipline to keep on chasing their dreams. Discipline helps a person to stay focused and to ignore distractions. In order to inculcate discipline, the person has to have a good amount of self-control and a willingness to sacrifice their time and sometimes happiness in order to achieve a much fuller satisfaction later.

6. Low self-esteem
A person’s self-esteem is another determinant of whether a person fails or succeeds. The lack of self-esteem usually stems from the life experiences that mould the self with unfavourable and develop negative feelings of self-worth.

Some people tend to take a fatalistic or even pessimistic view of life. These people have problems accepting responsibilities and will always attribute their success and failures to coincidence or fate.

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DEAR KAREN,
You should look at the positive aspects of your current situation to move forward. The fact that you failed in your business venture, does not mean that you will not be able to move forward and have a rewarding career as an employee. What is important is that you focus your energy and efforts on searching for the right opportunities. The following are some tips that will help you in your search and to figure out your options.

Are you sure you want to go back to the workforce? Your business failed due to lack of capital. Before deciding to go back to the workforce, have you considered other alternatives including securing financial assistance? What about searching for a partner that can provide funds? Have you approached any bank to discuss the possibilities of you borrowing some money?

If after doing your review, you decide that there is no future in your business, and you need to go back to the workforce, then please consider the following tips.

Identify your interest. From your review you may have identified some areas which you are interested in. Identify those areas and focus your energy and efforts on searching for new opportunities in those areas. Remember, you have the most skills, knowledge and passion. Once you answer this question, you will be able to move to the next step.

Prepare a professional CV. Your CV reflects who you are, therefore, be selective in what you include. There are a variety of formats available. Research and review them before deciding which one suits you best. Be concise, articulate and always ensure the content of your CV is accurate and up-to-date.

Don’t try to make yourself look better than you are by embellishing its content or adding one or two small details which may not be reflective of your actual experience/knowledge. Honesty, clarity and transparency in your CV will take you a long way. Remember, you will be asked the questions on your CV when you go for an interview, so don’t you want to be caught in a situation where you have to admit that you have not done something or you are not that familiar with something that you claim you did or knew.

Employers are not looking for perfect people. They are looking for individuals who are willing to contribute, work hard and commit to the achievement of their business objectives.

Identify your preferred potential employers. You will be wasting energy and money by sending your CV indiscriminately to every employer in town. Instead of that, review the type of employers that you want to pursue.

Understand their business, find out if there are vacancies in the type of roles you are interested in. Try to meet people in the organisations to understand their culture and their expectations.

You are a mature individual, therefore, employers will expect that you demonstrate this in your approach towards securing employment. They will not be as “forgiving” as they may be with a fresh graduate who is ignorant about the employment world. You have experience, therefore you have to put that experience to work to your advantage.

Cast your net wide. Once you know the employers you want to target, don’t just send them your CV. Look out for other options like talking to family members who may know someone in those organisations so that you can get a chance to submit your CV to someone in particular rather than to anyone.

Get in touch with headhunters that focus on securing employment for individuals in the industry of your preference.

Go to the employment websites and submit your CV for them to help you connect with potential employers.

Check out the work adverts in the newspapers. In other words, put yourself out there and let the world know that you are looking for a job.

Prepare for the interview. It may have been a while since you last attended an interview. Therefore, prepare and do your research. Ensure that you dress appropriately for the session.

Be prepared to answer any question about your educational background, your professional experience and your failed business.

Remember, failure is nothing to be ashamed of. There are learning opportunities for every failure, therefore turn this setback to your advantage and show your potential employers what you learnt with this experience.

Keep learning. As the interview and selection process may take some time, ensure that you occupy your time with productive activities like enhancing your skills/knowledge. You may want to enrol in some short term courses, take some distance learning courses, read books or even do some exercise to enhance your stamina.

Be positive. The most important step is to be positive. You may receive a few negative answers along the way. Try to find out what went wrong, but always remember it is the employers’ prerogative to give you feedback.

You can’t force them to give it to you. If they are willing to give you feedback, evaluate it. You should not justify yourself or try to explain the situation. You are there to learn, not to ask for a second chance, unless they are willing to give it to you of course.

I wish you all the best!
CLAUDIA CADENA

DEAR KAREN,
I do not despair! It shouldn’t be the end of the world for failing in business at 40. On a related topic, TalentCorp is looking at the issue of women returning to employment after a career break, which can arise either by virtue of looking after children or having followed their husband on an overseas assignment. In a survey conducted by ACCA, almost all women on a career break are considering the issue of women returning to employment, which can arise either by virtue of looking after children or having followed their husband on an overseas assignment. In a survey conducted by ACCA, almost all women on a career break are considering the issue of women returning to employment, which can arise either by virtue of looking after children or having followed their husband on an overseas assignment.

There is unfortunately anecdotal evidence which suggests that there are employers who are guarded against recruiting those who are not currently employed in the same field, either due to a career break or as in your case, having taken two years to run a business. Like those who have been on a career break, if your business was in a different field from what you were previously doing, there is a risk of employers questioning your commitment. This is unfortunate especially when Malaysia is short of talent, particularly of individuals like you who have experience in R&D, sales and marketing.

To enhance your job search, I would like to offer three suggestions:

1. Brand yourself. Given your varied experiences, you need to be clear about what your value proposition as a future employee is, particularly which experience will be of most value. Is it R&D, sales, skill sets or the networks established during the time you ran your business?

Prospective employers receiving your CV could be unclear on how to categorise you. Upon deciding what your ‘brand’ is, your CV needs to reflect and elaborate on your past experiences which support and reinforce your brand value.

2. Build on past networks. Having been in business, prospective employers may be wary about taking a chance on you. To mitigate this risk, do leverage on your past networks.

Apply to organisations where perhaps former colleagues would vouch for your capabilities or be your references to prospective employers.

Recommendations can help to at least secure an interview for you. If you are going back to the workshop, then your business, you may need to start at a level lower than your last post.

3. Research for progressive employers. You would have done some research on the potential employers that are interested in the skillsets that you have developed through your past experiences. Beyond that, you may also need to do research on companies that actively promote diversity and inclusion.

Organisations that are more advanced in diversity and inclusion will likely be open to hire talent like yours, who perhaps comes through an unconventional career path. In collaboration with myStarjob.com, TalentCorp will be launching a portal on July 8, which will showcase jobs on offer by leading employers who embrace diversity and have leading human resource practices.

I wish you all the best in your search. I am confident that there are organisations out there which will value your talent. You may, however, need to persevere to secure your job.

Best regards,
JOHAN MERICAN

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of myStarjob.com

If you have any suggestions or feedback on our content, get in touch with the Leaderonomics team at mystar@leaderonomics.com.
For advertising and advertorials, contact Ian.lee@leaderonomics.com - 016 974 7087

Also next week
TalentCorp features the dynamic, fast-paced world of the FMCG industry
Why organisational leadership paradigms need to change
Six facts that you did not know about your brain
Find out how to overcome lack of experience in Starting Young