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RIGHT ON TARGET

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HAPPY New Year! At the beginning of every year, I have a routine of sitting down and reflecting on the year before. I write in a journal to capture the biggest lessons I’ve learned, and the moments I appreciate. Then I look at the year to come, pray and write down the things I want to see.

Some call it New Year resolutions, I call it reflection and refocusing. Whatever you call it, the beginning of any journey is the best time to revisit values, goals and purpose to make sure you stay on track.

We chose to start off the year with an issue on focus. It’s a simple concept in theory, yet can be very difficult to implement in practice because of the world we live in.

We are so connected, and technology has brought information and people to our fingertips that we would otherwise have had to walk or drive out for. We’re at the dawn of 2014, and the rise of the year will surely bring new, further innovations in technology.

In an environment like this, concentration and focus become a real challenge. While doing research for this week’s stories, I learned that when people lack the ability to focus, their brain pathways actually adapt to their thinking patterns. So your habits become your physical reality.

But what can do to increase focus? It’s an important issue to consider as it gives birth to many prized things: productivity, creativity, opinions, analysis and innovation.

“A study published in the British Journal of Psychology and discussed on Scientific American has found that chewing gum during an exercise or activity focuses the participant and helps him/her remember number sequences and facts better.

“A study conducted by a professor at the University of Plymouth found out that doodling while in a context where you have to concentrate increases your concentration level. The same study also found that doodling also increases your memory by 30%.

Certain foods have a positive effect on increasing your alertness. These include caffeine, sugar, fish, nuts, chocolate, avocados, whole grains, blueberries, and overall, eating healthy meals. Having a well-balanced breakfast is especially beneficial to your concentration.

Environment Environment has to do with what is around you. Set up your workspace in a way that is conducive for you to do work. Tidy up the space, close out all distractions, and put up pictures and photos or plants that would help you relax.

Make sure you are in a comfortable setting. However, do work seated rather than lying down, as that would put you to sleep rather than help you concentrate.

MINDSET

Mindset Finally, mindset has to do with your attitude towards what you are doing, and your approach in tackling your tasks. Get in the right mood for work: block all other thoughts out, divide your tasks into subsections that are easier to manage, and deal with them one at a time.

Prioritise your tasks, and make sure you tackle the hardest ones when you are more alert. Switch between high and low attention-needing tasks to give your brain a break, and reward yourself with a break after achieving a certain amount of your workload.

Improving concentration takes much determination and commitment. It is something we can all be trained to do however, even those suffering from attention deficit disorder.

The opinions expressed in this career guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.
I T’s the job of a team leader to make sure the group functions as a well-oiled machine. His/her job entails foreseeing any hiccups that may arise, and motivating team members to go on, stay focused on the task at hand, and together, join forces to achieve the goal of each project. How can a leader ensure that his or her team remain focused and work well together on the task assigned to them?

Daniel Goleman, renowned author on emotional intelligence argues in his book Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence that directing attention to where it needs to go is a primal and essential task of leadership. Leaders are responsible for directing their own attention, but also that of their people. Goleman believes that there are three specific kinds of focus that make the difference between mediocre and high performance:

- Attention on oneself (self-awareness, letting you manage your inner world well);
- Attention on others (empathy that allows to build effective relationships); and
- Attention on the larger systems in which an organisation operates (directing you towards the strategy that will work best).

A leader’s field of attention – that is, the particular issues and goals she focuses on – guides the attention of those who follow her, whether or not the leader explicitly articulates them.

“People make their choices about where to focus based on their perception of what matters to leaders,” Goleman writes. “This ripple effect gives leaders an extra load of responsibility: they are guiding not just their own attention, but a large extent, everyone else’s,” he writes Goleman. He goes on: “Take, as a case in point, strategy. An organisation’s strategy represents the desired pattern of organisational attention, on which everyone should share a degree of focus, each in their particular way.

“A given strategy makes choices about what to ignore and what matters: Market share or profit? Current competitors or potential ones? Which new technologies? When leaders choose strategy, they are guiding attention.”

It boils down, therefore, to how leaders set and communicate strategies. “And once the strategic choice gets made, it needs to be communicated with passion and skill, drawing on cognitive and emotional empathy. But those personal skills alone will flounder if they lack strategic wisdom,” asserts Goleman.

Let’s look at how leaders can direct the attention of their people through their strategy setting and communication. Since people tend to do what they feel is important for their leader, they are likely to concentrate on the goal that they feel is important for the organisation – and their leaders - at a specific point in time.

Clarity in strategy is easier said than done – it requires, for starters, for leaders to lead their team to achieve the three kinds of focus that Goleman talks about. After all, a leader that cannot understand him/herself first, and the world and system in which they operate, cannot set a reasonable strategy for success.

Knowledge and understanding of these two elements is therefore essential to setting a clear, precise strategy. Courage is another element that is needed in order to redirect focus when necessary. The world around us is changing faster than ever before, and it takes a leadership team with courage to make decisions to shift and redirect the strategy when and where necessary to keep up at the very least, and ideally stay ahead with the competition.

The team is looking for such a division from the management/leadership – it is highly unlikely that the people will do this on their own.

EXPLORE AND EXPERIMENT

“Any business school course on strategy will tell you about two approaches: exploitation and exploration. Some people – and some businesses like RIM (Research in Motion) – succeed through a strategy of exploitation, where they refine and learn how to improve an existing capacity, technology, or business model. Others find their road to success through exploration, by experimenting with innovative alternatives to what they do now.”

This is Goleman’s explanation of BlackBerry’s failure to change its strategy on time and keep up with the competition.

A leader who is slow in foreseeing this change and redirecting the attention of his/her team towards a new strategy, eventually has to pay the circumstances, just like BlackBerry is doing for the last four years.

Those who exploit can find a safer path to profits, while those who explore can potentially find a far greater success in the next new thing – though the risks of failure are greater, and the horizon of payback further away. Exploration is the torture, exploration the hare. “The best decision-makers are ambidextrous in their balance of the two, knowing when to switch from one to the other. They can lead switch-hitting organisations, which are, for instance, good at seeking growth by simultaneously innovating and containing costs – two very different operations.”

And the trick lies here – paying attention to what goes on around you, and knowing when to play it safe and stick to your initial strategy, and when it’s time to move on and adapt with the times.

So how else can leaders direct the attention of their people? Daniel H. Straub, professor of Leadership Studies at Geneva College gives us a couple more pointers.

BE A SERVANT

One, is servant leadership. Straub argues that making yourself helpful to your team rather than bossing them around and expecting them to deliver, leads to long term effectiveness.

Not only does it allow your team to run smoothly, with everyone working together making the most of each members’ strengths, it also allows you to pay attention to all the details – those tiny pieces of information that you would otherwise miss.

That information may be crucial in allowing you to have an insight that may lead to a change in your strategy and focus. Never underestimates the power of helping your team.

OVER-COMMUNICATE

In addition, Straub talks about communication and information sharing. As mentioned earlier, clarity is crucial when it comes to directing the attention of your people and keeping them on track.

By EVA
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IT BOILS DOWN. THEREFORE, HOW LEADERS SET AND COMMUNICATE STRATEGIES.

Especially so in times of crises, but necessary at all times, it is important to over-communicate with your team.

Part of that, of course, entails practicing much of the skill of listening.

Instead of just spreading information, spend time listening to the thoughts and concerns of your team – you never know what useful insights you may gather this way.

“Real communication is two-way,” Straub puts it. Put in the effort, therefore, and see how you can redirect your team’s attention by something as simple as that.

With the joys of promotion to a leadership position always comes much bigger responsibility. And this responsibility entails ensuring that the team remains focused on what they need to be focusing on.

It is the duty of a manager/leader to encourage and nurture this focus, and it requires him or her to know them/herself first, know the conditions they are operating in, and engage with their people constantly in order to maintain a clear, as well as current message to them.

It is not so difficult, if you think about it, however reflection is a major part of it and clarity is definitely key.
By CINDY YAP
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It’s that time of the year again! Time to make New Year resolutions. Voicemails of life often get in the way between us and our goals, but we should not let that deter us from setting goals in the first place, especially career goals.

When we spend more than half of our waking hours at work, we eventually develop an attitude of “stagnation.” This sees us following the path of least resistance and choosing to stay in our comfort zone.

But setting resolutions or goals helps to counter the tendency to stagnate. Having obtainable objectives in our career can lead not only to increased job satisfaction in the long run, but increased self-esteem and improved overall well-being.

Dr Edwin Locke and Dr Gary Latham, both pioneer researchers on goal setting in the late 1960s, emphasise on the inseparable link between setting specific, challenging goals and workplace performance.

Goals may be in a form of a change in career, an advance on the career ladder in a current occupation or an advance in the earning level.

As you formulate your resolutions for the year, here are some goal-setting tips to keep in mind:

1. DETERMINE YOUR PASSION, ASPIRATION AND STRENGTHS
   For a start, dig into your true desires and what you are good at. Find a way to channel the passion which motivates you to wake up in the morning, into something productive in the workplace.

2. ESTABLISH GOALS AND WORK TOWARDS THEM
   Setting goals usually involves backward planning, i.e. determining where you want to be (i.e. your destination) and working backwards to where you are currently and ascertaining how you want to work towards the goal (i.e. the journey).

3. BE REALISTIC
   In order to avoid feeling discouraged, make sure you have the time and energy to commit towards the journey.

   Personify your attributes, personality and interest and assess its compatibility with your long term career vision. Do also consider whether it fits into your current lifestyle or the lifestyle that you yearn for.

   For instance, a working mother with young children may not find a high-flying, jet-setting career which requires extensive overseas assignments viable in her circumstances.

   Nonetheless, allow some flexibility or a plan B which takes you to the same goal via different routes, where necessary, as circumstances may change along the journey.

4. SHORT AND LONG-TERM GOALS
   With a clear long-term ambition, proceed to create short term and intermediate goals which are achievable in one to three years.

   For instance, if you are already in a profession you love, consider a specific position you would like to attain in five years or beyond.

   After doing so, you can create little milestones to support that long term goal. It could be in the form of equipping yourself with new skills or acquiring new knowledge to better off your chances.

   Small achievable tasks will provide baby steps to accomplish and provide motivation to move forward.

5. BRICKBATS AND BOUQUETS
   Work closely with your direct bosses to ensure both are on the same wavelength in ambitions and expectations. While the bouquets are a good measure of your progress, invite honest feedback on your performance and always be open towards any constructive criticism given.

6. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS
   No man is an island. Building relationships within and across departments is one of the most important factors for resiliency and career success.

   Feedback providers, coaches and mentors can help us connect, develop, gain support and observe and learn from others, share information and show initiative in projects which will enhance our overall portfolio.

7. WHAT IS WORK-LIFE BALANCE TO YOU?
   Aside from your career, other segments important in your life include family, personal growth, spirituality, fitness/health and friendships.

   Many believe that work-life balance is an unachievable myth which remains elusive. However, studies show that it is one of the most important workplace attributes, as well as one of the most important drivers of employee attraction and commitment.

   Employees work much harder for companies that offer better work-life balance.

   So establish your own healthy equilibrium in order to feel more personal satisfaction, to be better-rounded and to be truly present in each realm of your life.

8. BELIEVE AND NEVER QUIT
   Focus on your destination and identify distractions along the way. Distractions could be in the form of negative thinking, the fear of failure or rejection, or even self-sabotaging.

   If you continually think about and visualise what you want, and do it with passion, your enhanced desire will help eliminate any fear or apprehension that’s holding you back.

   Every goal starts with a dream – harness these dreams and turn them into a workable plan. Setting goals, though not a guarantee to success, increases the odds greatly.

   Remember, the future is not limited to what is happening today, so turn off the negativity, set your goals, go forth and never give up.

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2014 GOALS

1. Go for a 30 minute walk every day
2. Invite honest feedback on your performance.
3. Identify distractions.
4. Set short and long-term goals.
5. Align your ambitions with those of your boss.
6. Seek feedback from your direct boss.
7. Reflect on your progress.
8. Believe in yourself and never give up.

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THE SIMPLEST WAY TO INCREASE BRAINPOWER

Also, consider this:

- Walking is free.
- Walking does not stress your joints.
- When you travel, walking is the best way to explore.
- Regular walking lessens your chances of diabetes.
- Walking perks up your mood and adds energy.
- Walking is good for your heart. And, what’s good for the heart is good for the brain.
- Regular walkers have fewer strokes than their sedentary peers.

The relationship between walking and brain health is clear. So, here’s what I did: I realised how 10,000 steps are needed every day for basic brain and heart health. I wasn’t really sure how many daily steps I was getting. So, I got a pedometer.

My pedometer cost US$35. It has a motion detector and I just put it in my front pocket and off I went. Here’s the interesting part. The first few days I got in around 10,000 steps. I was quite pleased when I hit 12,000 one day.

Then, the number started heading up and it kept going. It is rare now that I don’t get in 20,000 daily steps. And, it doesn’t seem like I’m doing anything different. Just having the pedometer in my pocket seems to nudge my lobes to get up and move more.

Remember, speed matters. Pick up the pace a little.

Cindy Yap is the author of “Your Brain on Work.” To succeed in the organisation, you need to learn how to learn easier, better, faster, and to feel more personal satisfaction. For more tips, visit mystarjob.com.

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HOW TO?

By TERRY SMALL
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What’s the easiest, quickest way to increase your brainpower? Stand up right now and go for a walk. But, read this first.

A new study recently found that going for a 30 minute walk every day can cut your risk of memory loss and Alzheimer’s by a whopping 50%!

How come? Walking maintains oxygen supply to your neurons which is committed to help to do just that.

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Always 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.
ONE EASY WAY TO INSTANTLY IMPROVE FOCUS

By LILY CHEAH
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H ERE’s a sure way to boost your concentration: get more sleep! When our bodies are deprived of sleep, the consequences can be dire.
Here are some broad cognitive performance effects of sleep deprivation according to a 2005 study by researchers from Emory University and the University of Pennsylvania called Neurocognitive Consequences of Sleep Deprivation:

- Involuntary microsleeps occur
- Attention-intensive performance becomes unstable with increased errors
- Time pressure increases cognitive errors
- Response time slows (a study involving a driving simulation showed that people who don’t have enough sleep drive as poorly as those who are drunk!)
- Short-term recall and working memory performances decline
- Reduced learning (acquisition) of cognitive tasks
- Performance requiring divergent thinking deteriorates
- Increased compensatory effort is required to remain behaviourally effective
- Task performance will be good, but performance deteriorates as task duration increases
- There is growing neglect of activities judged to be nonessential (loss of situational awareness)

There is overall effect on quality of life as well. The Guide to Healthy Sleep by the National Institutes of Health says animal studies suggest that sleep is just as important as food. Rats, that normally live for two to three years, experience rapid decline in lifespan if they don’t get enough sleep. When they lack REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, they live for only five weeks.
When they are deprived of all sleep stages, they die within three weeks. This is “a timeframe similar to death due to starvation,” it writes. There are suggestions of similarities between lack of sleep and aging as well. When there is extreme sleep deprivation, such as one study where young individuals were deprived of sleep for 36 hours, cognitive performance of the young subjects deteriorated to the level of the elderly.
So here’s the big question. How much sleep do we need? It varies according to age and also individuals. Some adults can function well with seven hours per night, while others need nine or more.
Teenagers need between nine and 10 hours of sleep. At this age, there is a tendency to sleep later at night, and, therefore, a desire to wake up later in the morning. The Guide to Healthy Sleep points out the conflict when teenagers have to wake up early for school, and don’t get the hours they need.
To those with concentration problems, Vishal G. Thakkar, MD, clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine advises sleeping seven to nine hours a night for at least two weeks. If nothing improves, Thakkar advises seeing a sleep specialist.

THE CYCLE OF SLEEP
But while length of sleep is important, understanding the stages of sleep is crucial as well. Researchers and medical practitioners commonly attribute impairment of the ability to focus to the lack of deep sleep (stage three of non-REM sleep). There are two types of sleep: non-REM and REM sleep.

NON-REM SLEEP
Stage 1 (N1): Light sleep; easily awakened, muscles relax with occasional twitches; eye movements are slow.

Stage 2 (N2): Slight brain waves, with occasional bursts of rapid brain waves
Stage 3 (N3): Occurs soon after you fall asleep and mostly in the first half of the night. Deep sleep; difficult to awaken; large slow brain waves, heart and respiratory rates are slow and muscles are relaxed.

REM SLEEP
It usually first occurs about 90 minutes after you fall asleep, and longer, deeper periods occur during the second half of the night; cycles along the non-REM stages throughout the night.

- Eyes move rapidly behind closed eyelids
- Breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure are irregular
- Dreaming occurs
- Arm and leg muscles are temporally paralysed

Source: Your Guide to Healthy Sleep, National Institutes of Health

YOU CAN’T MULTITASK, SO STOP IT

By LILY CHEAH
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ALTHOUGH it may stroke your ego to say you can multitask, the reality is that we can’t. Earl Miller, a professor of neuroscience at MIT says that we’re not doing multiple things at once. Importantly, it’s a switch-back-and-forth mechanism, not an all-at-once.
Here are two reasons why you should limit multitasking or rapid focus-shifting:

1. YOUR WORKING MEMORY HAS LIMITED CAPACITY
Our short-term working memory, which holds all that we’re currently aware and conscious of, can only store two to four pieces of information at once.

According to research by Nicholas Carr, author of The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains and former executive editor of Harvard Business Review, points out how the 1956 paper The Magical Number Seven, which posited our ability to store seven pieces of information in our working memory at once was an overestimation.

Think of your working memory like a plate with limited space. When something new is introduced onto the plate, something currently on it must go out to make room for the new piece of information.

When your brain is bombarded with information, it gets overloaded and information must move in and out of your working memory.

“When that happens, you’re never paying close attention to anything. You’re never focusing on one thing for an extended period of time,” says Carr. When the brain is processing different information very rapidly, it impacts our ability to chew on the information and even work out irrelevant or incorrect data. It doesn’t get registered into long-term memory either. This lack of sustained meditation on one thing inevitably affects our ability to learn, which brings us to the point.

2. “MULTITASKING” IMPEDES YOUR ABILITY TO FOCUS, LEARN AND BE CREATIVE
A 2009 study by Stanford researcher Clifford Nass compared the performance of chronic multitaskers with others at a series of tasks. Nass found that chronic multitaskers use their brain less effectively.

Interestingly, if we multitask all the time, Nass’ research shows that there are long-term changes to our brain. It becomes accustomed to jumping back and forth between information, so much so, that it becomes very difficult for you to remain focused and concentrate on any one thing.

If you’re not chewing on information and giving it time to birth new thoughts in your mind, then your creativity will be limited too.

Here are some practical things you can do to reduce multitasking at work:

- The 20-minute rule - Try researcher Clifford Nass’ 20-minute rule. Focus on one task for 20 minutes before you switch to another. Avoid switching tasks from minute to minute.
- Limit emailing - Controlling your access to emails will reduce stress, enable you to focus more, and reduce the frequency at which you change screens. So says a University of Irvine study by Gloria Mark and Stephen Voida.
- Have bursts of attention with breaks in between - Breaks actually help increase productivity. A study by the National University of Singapore found that employees who never go online during work are less effective than those who spend time up to 20% of their time browsing the Internet.
UNLOCKING YOUR HIDDEN DRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS

By Ur Rahman

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7 STEPS TO FOCUS BETTER

1. ATTENTION 101
   Before you can develop a laser-like focus prowess, understand that distractions are every-where. At work or at home, we are constantly over-whelmed by interruptions. Researchers have clustered them into two main varieties: sensory and emotional. The former is straightforward (notice how you have not paid full attention to your surroundings at your moment), while the latter is more challenging (by not to focus on that voice calling your name in the back- ground). As human beings, we are emotional by nature. When stress hits, our brain is set on an alert state even for the slightest bit. Our ability to focus ties directly to the degree we have self-knowledge.

2. LOOKING GLASS SELF
   There are moments that call for your attention to make a decision, and more often than not you get “out-of-focus”. As it turns out, those decisions are made with your inner compass, determined by your deepest desires and values.

3. SEE THE WORLD THROUGH OTHERS’ EYES
   Are you someone who habitually has a “lens” to view the world? This ability to see changing trends and consumer needs is one of the most important factors in leadership. With an eye to consumers, great leaders can make it if they clock the magical hours. The examples given were of course, highly anecdotal. They reveal the DNA where every single person is fully on board with the mission and more.

5. 10,000 HOURS, AND MORE
   By now you would have been forewarned or with the notion of the 10,000 hours of practice can make you proficient at a specific task made popular by Malcolm Gladwell. That idea became a highly debatable argument, with varying levels of acceptance.

6. THINK DIFFERENT
   On an organisational level, great focuses separate the best from the rest. Sensing an important market trend, a well executed strategy, and the collective determina-tion of everyone in the company can make or break the business. You can consider yourself lucky if all that is inherent in your organisation. More often than not, the leadership has the ultimate responsibility to make that happen.

7. THE BIG, LONG-TERM PICTURE
   It’s easier to appoint someone to take up the difficult endeavour, but remember the butterfly effect—every little change can impact the bigger picture. This seven steps flows and expands from the core. Beginning with talent acceleration, the next stages are organisational focus, linking to self-awareness and empathy with others. Following by contextual understanding that all lie in the big picture, they all converge on one com-mon thread—focus. Focus in its entirety is fast becoming a rarity. Information overload at hyper speed is real and constant in today’s society, making it easy to lose focus in a blink. The choice is ours for the future.

If your aim is to read more books, you’re in luck as this piece is a take on the book Focus: The !0,000 Hour Solution by Daniel Co linear. Perhaps the takeaway can shed some light on the power of understanding focus in a more holistic way.

As human beings, we are emotional by nature. When stress hits, we tend to lose control even for the slightest bit. Our ability to focus ties directly to the degree we have self-knowledge. That is a big chunk of lost opportunity especially if it requires critical decision making. If you would like to know how you can control your attention for a unlimited period of time, and the benefits of it, read along the seven steps below. Ready, set, focus.

HAPPY 2014! Another year, another set of opportunities and challenges. Within the same time span, our past. The year ups and downs, highs and lows, and setbacks and breakthroughs. In looking back, are you satisfied?

If it’s safe, it’s time of the year again. We plan and frame our minds right, promising ourselves that the coming year is going to be better than before.
Does Leadership Coaching Improve Organisational Performance?

By Dr Glenn Williams

While the economic downturn has been detrimental to many businesses, positive approaches have emerged that will help organisations deal with the challenges while helping to lay a more solid foundation for the future. Importantly, the key challenge for organisations is to engage, align and motivate their leaders around the critical issues.

Myopic Vision vs. Accountable Leadership

Many leaders with a narrow, myopic vision for their business have had to adopt a balanced approach to their vision and strategy. A lot of discussion has emerged from the dilemma this causes. A balanced approach does not deny the importance of being extremely focused and intentional about what needs to be accomplished. It merely acknowledges that there is considerable risk when a leader’s myopic vision is unable to pursue strategic opportunities that exist on the periphery. It keeps “the main thing the main thing”, while seeing that there may be a more productive path towards achieving the desired business objectives.

A couple of excellent books that you might want to look at are Good Strategy Bad Strategy by Richard Rumelt (2012), and The First 90 Days by Michael Watkins (2003). This represents a bit of a cross-section of resources available.

Focused Vision

The old adage that “what gets measured, gets done” is critical to the health of any organisation. This applies not only to financial measures, but output and productivity gains, and especially the rising prominence of human capital.

“Command-and-control” leadership has been found wanting through the recession, and in many cases responsible for it. There is no doubt that strong leadership is required, and in turnaround situations tighter control is required. However, increasingly, leaders are recognising the importance of developing more disciplined and participative cultures that are committed to remaining the path to implementing strategy. This is supported by the demands for good governance, accountability and transparency in the private and public sectors.

Investment in Talent Management

In many cases the economic downturn has led to unprecedented challenges in global competition, rapidly changing markets, and stakeholder expectations that have resulted in organisations tightening their belts and reducing their budgets. As companies try to do more with less, employees are being asked to take on greater demands and carry more stress, and there are the issues of declining morale and loss of productivity, causing leaders to question the importance of how their financial resources and human capital is best utilised.

Consequently, organisations are taking steps to acquire and retain leadership competencies through development interventions, otherwise known as leadership or executive coaching.

At its broadest level, coaching is generally defined as a “process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective”.

While the research into the effectiveness of behavioural feedback as a method of management development has been relatively weak and inconsistent, some results show that when it is coupled with leadership coaching, subordinates indicate a small, but significant improvement.

This was further strengthened when leaders provided encouragement, incentives and opportunities to apply feedback. Another key factor in delivering leadership coaching with the goal of seeing improved performance is that those receiving the coaching must believe that the primary motivation is for “to help the employee rather than to help themselves.”

Therefore, when coaching is being provided directly through an individual’s supervisor, it is important that supervisors be trained to improve the quality of the exchange. While this doesn’t negate the obvious underlying motivation every organisation has, which is to see leaders improve their performance as it relates to business outcomes, it says that a development perspective the primary goal must be individually focused, knowing that the organisation will ultimately be the beneficiary.

To better understand the impact of leadership coaching, Right Management conducted a global study of more than 28,000 employees in ten industry sectors in 35 countries. The results provided a compelling case for leadership coaching that showed when a leader’s development was in alignment and informed by their organisation’s strategy, culture, values, processes and structure, coaching became a powerful mechanism for impacting the organisation.

While empirical research into the outcomes from leadership coaching as a development intervention has been limited, Feldman and Lankau (2005) provide some excellent insights in reviewing current research and provide an agenda for future research. These are summarised as:

> The importance of a Leadership Coach’s background and experience
> Desired outcomes from executive coaching

Executive coaching is provided with a two-fold objective—to see positive changes in leadership and managerial behaviours, and secondly, to see an increase in performance and organisational effectiveness. Once again, there are three independent variables that impact the ability to effectively measure these objectives:

1. The background and experience of the executive coach
2. The ability to link the coaching to the organisation’s business outcomes, and
3. Whether or not the individuals receiving the coaching understand that their development intervention is more about their future than the organisation’s.

Though it is early days, limited empirical data supports leadership coaching is a construct that can clearly result in improved leadership engagement and recognition, positive behavioural changes, improved moral and stronger performance.

Dr Williams is the CEO and Principal owner of Outward looking International, an organisation that empowers leaders and organisations to grow their leadership capacity. To engage Williams for special leadership workshops for your organisation, email people@leadersonomics.com
3 PRINCIPLES FOR A GREAT 2014

COMING BACK TO THE QUINTESSENCE OF LIFE

By LILY CHEAH

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By LILY CHEAH

S TRANGELY delightful would be my description of Ben Stiller’s latest film, The Secret Life of Walter Mitty. It’s a modern take on Walter Mitty, who first graced film screens in the 1940s under Samuel Goldwyn. For readers who haven’t watched the movie, I’d suggest reading no further than here, as there are spoilers ahead.

Mitty, played by producer and director Ben Stiller himself, is a serial daydreamer and quiet photo editor at LIFE magazine, who possesses an uncanny and rather infuriating ability to pause midway through a daily task and be whisked away by the fancies of his imagination. In his mind, he is a hero, with no fear of speaking his mind and he lives up to the hope of being himself, as he battles the changing dynamics of today’s world (the digitisation of content) and takes on for himself. Becoming a personal purpose that Mitty owned had already lost his job.

As Mitty begins to engage with life, reality far surpasses any of his imaginations as he finds out: as Stiller puts it, life is “amazing, worthwhile and magical in its own way.”

Mitty being stricken by the Benjamin Button condition.

Walter’s journey celebrates the potential that everybody has.”

The start of the year is a great time to revisit your purpose, be it at work or otherwise. Articulate it, own it, and let it guide you on an adventure.

1. EMBRACE REALITY, BECAUSE FACT CAN BE STRANGELY BETTER THAN FICTION

Mitty’s imagination is at its peak at the beginning of the film, bringing us scenes like Mitty being stricken by the Benjamin Button condition. He imagines himself as an old baby cuddling up to an elderly Cheryl on the front porch of their home. This is one of the rare moments where Stiller’s usual humour shines through.

In another scene, while riding the lift up with his obnoxious new boss, Tim Hendricks, Mitty transforms into a hero with Hulk-like strength fighting Hendricks and tearing up the streets of New York.

One morning, walking down his office hallway, Mitty’s imagination transforms him into a Chilean climber with icicles hanging from his hair and beard, sweeping Cheryl off her feet. But as the film progresses, the line between fact and fiction begins to blur as audiences begin to question if what they are watching is another daydream of Mitty’s.

In the climactic adventure that surpasses his imagination, Mitty begins to engage with life, reality far surpasses any of his imaginations as he finds out: as Stiller puts it, life is “amazing, worthwhile and magical in its own way.”

It’s reminiscent of the motto of LIFE magazine, which features regularly during the film: “To see the world, things dangerous to come to, to see behind walls, draw closer, to find each other and to feel. That is the purpose of life.”

2. LET PURPOSE LEAD YOU ON AN ADVENTURE

“How the hell did you get here?” asks Sean O’Connell at the top of the Northern Himalayas in Afghanistan. Mitty, bewildered at finally finding and meeting O’Connell in person, answers very simply: “I was looking for you.”

It’s a very short answer on the part of the director. Mitty’s imagination is at its peak at the beginning of the film, bringing us scenes like Mitty being stricken by the Benjamin Button condition. He imagines himself as an old baby cuddling up to an elderly Cheryl on the front porch of their home. This is one of the rare moments where Stiller’s usual humour shines through.

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Instead of taking the photo of the snow leopard, photographer O’Connell (Sean Penn) chooses to enjoy the moment.
ARE WOMEN LOSING OUT?

By PREMA JAYABALAN
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WOMEN today have more privileges and exposure compared with women of a few generations ago. During our mothers’ era, career opportunities for women were limited. The working world was dominated by men. Even when it came to pursuing tertiary education, there were more men than women. However, this culture has taken a drastic turn.

Today, women are enjoying the opportunities of having a good education, holding good positions in organisations as well as having their own families. Nevertheless, despite all these privileges, when it comes to leadership and holding top positions in organisations, the story is indeed very disappointing.

According to the chief operating officer of Facebook and the first woman to serve on Facebook’s board Sheryl Sandberg, women are not making it to the top in any profession, anywhere around the world.

“In a poll of 190 heads of state, only nine are women. Of all the people in parliaments all around the world, only 13% are women. When it comes to the corporate sector, women on the top who are holding C level jobs or who sit on the boards, there are only 26% to 27% of them and sadly, the numbers have not increased since 2002. “Even when it comes to the non-profit organisations, where we think that women hold a vast number of lead roles, there are only 20% of women at the top,” says Sandberg in a popular TEDWomen talk from 2010.

Why is this phenomenon occurring? Is it because of one’s behaviour or perception? Ontological Coach, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) master practitioner and a PSYCH-K facilitator from London with 20 years’ experience in Investment Banking Piya Khanna believes that the biggest reason is that women do not believe in themselves and lack the self-confidence to go for top jobs.

“More often than not, women self-select themselves out of jobs (or should I say self-reject) because of their beliefs that their abilities limit them - for example, ‘they’ll never hire me’ or ‘I don’t have the qualifications’ or ‘I don’t know everything’

There is to know about doing the job. The result is that fewer women actually apply for senior positions, so automatically the talent pool has a disproportionate number of male applicants,” she explains.

“The interesting thing is, men often do the opposite - if they don’t know everything there is to know about the job, they assume ‘they will pick it up as they go along’.

“They go in with the attitude of ‘I’ve nothing to lose, cannot hurt to go for it’ and generally believe that they have what it takes to do the job. Also women constantly seek reassurance that they are doing well, they are not making mistakes and this sort of constant self-questioining is destructive as it does not really foster their managers’ belief in them.”

On another note, Sandberg says that women don’t negotiate for themselves in the workforce. According to her, a study for the past few years on people entering the workforce right after college showed that 57% of the men were negotiating their first salary but only 7% of women were doing so.

Another thing is, men attribute their successes to only themselves but women attribute them to other external factors. For example, if you ask men why they did a good job, their answer will be: “because I am awesome” but a woman would reply “someone helped me” or “I got lucky” or “I really worked hard”.

Sandberg has three valuable messages to be conveyed to all women who want to stay in the workforce and carve a name for themselves in their career path.

1. SIT AT THE TABLE

Always be where the main agenda is. For example, at a board meeting or any meeting that you attend, play an active role and make sure that you are noticeable. Don’t sit at the corner where there are chances for your presence to be missed. According to Sandberg, no one gets to the top by sitting on the side and not at the table.

“No one will get the promotion if one doesn’t think or he or she deserve success or doesn’t even understand one’s own success.” It is important for you to believe in yourself first and negotiate for yourself if you know you are worth it.

Sandberg believes that each of us should tell ourselves to believe in our potential and to reach for the promotions and opportunities available without doubting our abilities.

“Men are reaching for opportunities more than women and it is time to get women to sit at the table.”

2. MAKE YOUR PARTNER A REAL PARTNER

Along the years, women have made more progress in the workforce than they have at home. According to Sandberg, data shows that if a woman and a man have a full time job and a child, the woman does twice the amount of housework the man does and contributes three times more into child caring so when the question of who stays at home arises, the answer is easy.

By eliminating this stereotype will only create a fair play for women to stay in the workforce and to reach out for the top notch positions.

3. DON’T LEAVE BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Sandberg says that some women have the objective of staying in the workforce, yet the actions they take lead them eventually quitting.

For example, amidst the busy working life, some women start to think about having a child.

“From the moment, they start doing so, thoughts of making room for the baby and nurturing for the child arise. At that point, these women do not raise their hands anymore. They slowly move to the corner, do not take on new projects and do not look for promotions and new ventures to widen their horizons. They start leaning back,” she explains.

She adds that if it is ironic but women start thinking about this way too early - even before they get pregnant. Some even think about this before they are even married. These thoughts eventually result in them becoming passive in their job and not reaching the milestones which otherwise would have been easy to achieve.

“Once you have a child, your job must be really good to go back to because it’s hard to leave that kid at home. Your job needs to be challenging and rewarding. If two years ago, you didn’t take a promotion and if someone next to you did, or if three years ago, you stopped looking for new opportunities, just because you were thinking way ahead without realising, (you are less likely to want to come back).

“Keep your foot on the gas pedal until the very day you need to leave to take a break for a child. And then make your decision. Don’t make your decision too far in advance,” she concludes.

It has been such in the norm of society where the pressure is on the boys to succeed more than the girls. Hence, it is difficult for stay-at-home fathers as they are not given much support by the society.

It is very crucial to give equal importance to the job of working inside the home for people of both genders without coming across as being biased.

By eliminating this stereotype will only create a fair play for women to stay in the workforce and to reach out for the top notch positions.

The interesting thing is, men often do the opposite - if they don’t know everything there is to know about the job, they assume ‘they will pick it up as they go along’.
A plethora of conferences and seminars, catering to a wide range of interests and specifically for each age category, are available nowadays.

However, youths, unlike working adults, rarely have a company to subsidise their participation fees or to provide them with travelling allowances. While it is easy to find events that we (youths) are interested to attend, it is often more difficult to figure out how we are actually going to make it to the event.

Sometimes organisers and their partners might host competitions that enable winners to attain full sponsorship to attend the event. These sponsorships regularly cover the participation fees as well as the accommodation and travel costs. On other occasions, the potential participants are mostly left to their own devices. Some potential participants reach out to the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) department of organisations, which are related to the field of the conference they want to attend, for a sponsorship.

The amount of sponsorship provided to cover the event’s participation fees as well as related accommodation and travel costs depends on the company’s annual allocated budget to support external programmes. That said, seeking a sponsorship is always worth the shot. So, here are few key things to keep in mind when seeking for an external sponsorship:

1. **TELL A STORY**
   - Most people think that it is only appropriate to write to large corporations for sponsorships in a formal tone. While it is advisable to maintain a decent amount of respect for the person you are addressing in your letter or email, it is also vital to ensure that you do not bore the reader with an incredibly detached voice, so void of any personality and emotion, that the whole text could have been easily mistaken as a spam produced by a droid.

2. **PASSION SHINES THROUGH**
   - Enthusiasm is infectious. When you deeply believe in something, you will be able to sell your idea with more conviction. Think of a salesman. Would you even bat an eyelash for his product if he does not even care about it?

Deep interest also shows potential sponsors that you are truly interested in and serious about the topic of the event. It ensures the sponsors that it is worth their investment and that you are not going to the event just to enjoy the food.

3. **DO YOUR RESEARCH**
   - Sponsors want to know what the event is all about. It is worst to know that they will be sponsoring someone to attend an event that will degrade the person’s moral value and that could potentially contribute to more chaos in the society in the future than to know the person will meet his/her true love at the event.

Also, the sponsors cannot be doing all the research because they might not have time and it is the attendee’s responsibility. You need to know why you want to attend an event in the first place.

4. **BE INNOVATIVE**
   - Sometimes the straight-forward method of entering a competition or seeking an external corporate sponsor might not work out. Then again, when there is a will, there will be a way. You could raise funds through crowd sourcing platforms or through organising car washes or baking sales. You could also babysit, walk dogs or clean your friend’s room for a fee. These methods might take a longer time and may not be as instantaneous as having someone else pay for you. But if you really want to attend the event, why not?

5. **DON’T BE AFRAID TO FAIL**
   - Finally don’t be afraid to fail. Take it as a chance to reflect upon your activities and learn more about yourself. In fact, failures can open more doors of opportunities. Since you have tried so hard to be a participant but still could not make it, now you have the excuse of gatecrashing the event.

Although it is not advisable and is something done with risks you must personally bear, done strategically (or tastefully), it could be a conversation (and hopefully) a friendship starter with the organisers.

If you are not so capricious, you could also consider the more demure option: volunteering. You could work at the event in exchange for your presence there.

Eibhlin is an 18-year-old who is currently self-educating by reading, watching online tutorials and attending conferences. She has attended conferences around the world on sponsorship.

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**1. VOLUNTEER**

This is an excellent way to contribute to the community with benefits for you as well. Through volunteering you will be able to meet new people, make new friends, gain new skills and experience or develop existing skills to enhance your curriculum vitae or CV.

There are different types of volunteering such as skills-based volunteering which means leveraging specialised skills and talents of individuals to strengthen the infrastructure of nonprofits. Another type includes volunteering in developing countries, to work on projects such as teaching English or working in orphanages. There is also environmental volunteering where volunteers contribute towards environmental management or conservation.

The most important thing you should consider when you decide to volunteer is to choose an organisation that you are passionate about. You can get more information about volunteering opportunities on dogoodvolunteer.com

**2. PICK UP A NEW SKILL**

You may have not had many opportunities or the time to pick up skills such as learning to play the guitar, kick boxing or a new language.

This is a perfect time for you to pick up a skill or even enhance your existing skills. This is a great way to find out about things that truly interest you which can serve you well when you are deciding on your career path. It is always good to have an additional skill that may even end up as your hobby. Besides, you now have all the time to practise and put your new skill to use.

**3. DO SHORT COURSES**

Short courses usually range from less than a week up to six months. This really depends on the course you are pursuing and the certification that you will obtain thereafter.

There are short courses ranging from learning photography skills, accounting, mastering the English language etc. I would encourage pursuing a course that you are interested in because you will be enjoying what you do besides obtaining a recognition for it.

**4. GET A PART TIME JOB**

Getting a part time job will help expose you to the working world which is different from school life where you were told what to do. Through an actual job you will get a different point of view of what the real working world entails. Besides, earning some extra pocket money will help you appreciate the value of money better.

**5. READ**

Reading is one of the best ways to broaden your horizons and improve your language. Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.

While you are busy preparing for your SPM, reading books beyond examination scope might be the last thing on your to do list. Now that you have time on your side, you should read, and read a lot! You may also choose to develop skills in relation to reading such as speed reading that will help you tremendously when you start your tertiary education.

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Tarcayani is a scholar currently in her second year of university studies. She believes in making the most out of life and seizing every opportunity to learn and grow.
WHO doesn’t love a good quote. To start 2014, we’ve compiled some of our favourite quotes that we hope will spur you on this year. To make things extra easy for you, you’ll notice that you can cut any of these out. Paste them on your workstation, share them with colleagues, and they’ll fit right in your wallet too.

**An organic farmer’s story on the joys of working with nature**

**Strategic Influencing is an essential tool to ensure overall success for an organisation**

**Did you know that reading novels is good for your brain?**

**An essential tool to ensure overall success for an organisation**

**Also next week**

**If you’re offered a seat on a rocket ship, don’t ask what seat! Just get on.**

— Sheryl Sandberg

**We know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. But if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something.**

— Mother Teresa

**It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.**

If you think about that you’ll do things differently.

— Warren Buffett

**“Don’t limit yourself! Many people limit themselves to what they think they can do. You can go as far as your mind lets you. What you believe, remember, you can achieve.”**

— Mary Kay Ash

**It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.**

— Aristotle Onassis

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