Who's driving?
Are you steering your own life or perpetually reacting to circumstances around you? → Pg 09

MALAYSIA'S BANK
Award-winning financial services provider AmBank Group’s journey of success

THE ULTIMATE CATCH
How to foster an environment of proactivity in organisations

CURIOUS IS GOOD
Set children up for a bright career by encouraging curiosity
TRY THIS!

Do you have an opinion you'd like to share with us? Write to us at mystarjob@leaderonomics.com. Please provide your full name, occupation (designation and employer) and telephone number.

STAY ON TOP OF THINGS

There is a vast difference between being reactive and proactive. Being reactive is to react to something that has happened whereas being proactive is to think and act before the situation to prevent any crisis. For example, a reactive person would say, “I need to see the doctor now because my throat is sore and nose is runny.” However, a proactive person would say, “I’ll drink more water, take vitamins and exercise regularly to stay healthy.”

Here are five stepping-stones to proactivity:

1. Start being responsible
   Take time to stop and think. Then, respond to the situation in the right manner.
   Be responsible for your mistakes instead of blaming others or the situation.

2. Be more organised
   Have a planner or schedule to balance your time more efficiently.
   Don’t react only after the fact because your mind foresees circumstances and doing something about it now rather than later.

3. Be proactive
   Do you have an opinion you’d like to share with us? Write to us at mystarjob@leaderonomics.com.
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4. Go the extra mile to be more efficient
   Plan for the future and prepare backup plans to prevent any possible flaws.
   An attitude like this will get you far whether in personal or professional circumstances.

5. Renew your mind
   Slowly change your mindset to prevent a problem from arising.
   Workplace is encouraged to embrace their ability to mould circumstances.
   This is a key element of their life and career success.

With my best,

LILY CHEAH
Editor, mystarjob.com

LOOK INTO THE FUTURE. WHAT DO YOU SEE?

LEADERS that I admire think 10 steps ahead of everyone else. They understand that if they want to truly lead, they must not only lead people, but also lead circumstances.

Jonathan Ive, senior vice-president of design at Apple, is a great example of someone who acknowledges their power to make things happen. In the 1990s, he observed that people had a distant relationship with computers.

“They weren’t comfortable with technology. If you’re scared of something, you won’t touch it,” he says in Walter Isaacson’s book, Steve Jobs. So he decided to do something about it.

In 1998, Apple released the colourful iMac with a handle on the back of the monitor. “A handle?” people asked. It had never been done before.

“I thought, if there’s this handle on it, it makes a relationship possible. It’s approachable,” Ive explained.

It implied that the computer was meant to be touched and carried, and was an object to serve its users. It was a bold and brilliant move to change society’s perception of technology, and it did.

People who are proactive like Ive make it a point to look into the future and play out possibilities in their heads.

They don’t react only after the fact because their mind foresees events long before they even take place. They are parameters and embrace their ability to mould circumstances. This is a key element of their life and career success.

But being proactive isn’t a faraway concept. It doesn’t have to involve changing the world. It’s about deciding, like in the classic story of the grasshopper and the ant, to take into account future circumstances and doing something about it now rather than later.

For the ant, it was working hard through the summer to gather food, while the grasshopper lazed in the sun. But when cold weather arrived, the ant had food stocked up while the grasshopper went hungry. The ant thought ahead.

Here’s a question. What would “proactiveness” look like in your world right now? Is it embracing the increasing steer towards mobile and making different decisions about the way you are reaching customers? Is it sitting down and understanding the future needs of your boss before they are even able to verbalise what they need?

Is it anticipating today the props and tools you’ll need for that brainstorming meeting tomorrow? Look into the future, and ask yourself what you can do about it now rather than later.

Here’s another thought to consider. I’ve never heard proactive leaders describe themselves as “proactive.”

The most effective leaders are individuals with strong purpose and values. Proactiveness comes naturally to them because they are fully committed to seeing their purpose and values through.

So if my purpose (and one that I truly take ownership of) is to ensure that my organisation produces the most innovative products in the world, I will naturally prepare for that brainstorming meeting tomorrow.

Ownership of purpose will naturally increase proactivity. There’s a thought if you’re looking to groom a team of highly proactive individuals.

This week’s issue examines numerous aspects of proactivity, which I believe isn’t talked about nor written about enough. I hope you enjoy these pages and that our stories will spur you on in your career and leadership. Wishing you a fantastic, purposeful week ahead.

MyStarjob.com, Saturday 15 February 2014

If you don’t love something, you’re not going to go the extra mile, work the extra weekend, challenge the status quo as much.
– STEVE JOBS

Be responsible for your mistakes instead of blaming others or the situation.

Leadership is simplified, positive results are increased and a brighter workplace is encouraged by being proactive.
– MIKI MARKOVICH

Practice self-control of one’s mind is a gift within itself.
– ELI LANDA

Being proactive is a pillar of spiritual growth and meaningful development.
– ELI LANDA

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TIME TO FLY

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• Graduates from any disciplines are encouraged to apply
• Dress code:
  Female - Smart casual (strictly knee length dress/skirt only) with full make up
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Absolutely essential

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Open to Malaysians only (Male/Female)

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YOUR BANK
MALAYSIA'S BANK
AmBank
A HOME-GROWN BRAND WITH
WORLD-CLASS ASPIRATIONS

By PREMA JAYABALAN
prema.jayabal@leaderonomics.com

SINCE its beginnings in 1975 as a merchant bank, the AmBank Group has grown from strength to strength. Today, it stands proud as one of the country’s most sought after financial services conglomerates. The group’s business comprises a wide range of conventional and Islamic financial products and services, with a regional presence.

“We have had a loyal following of customers over the years and I believe that this is due to the importance we give to our customers,” explains AmBank Group chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim.

“It is very important to be aware of our customers’ needs as they have become much more sophisticated today, with more demanding expectations,” he says.

The group recently launched a brand repositioning campaign with a new tagline, Your Bank. Malaysia’s Bank. AmBank. This is in line with its refreshed vision of being a merchant bank, the AmBank Group has grown from strength to strength.

A PEOPLE-FOCUSED CULTURE

AmBank Group’s Employee Value Proposition is built on the tenet that employees will have an opportunity to build a successful and rewarding career with the group. Employees are continuously challenged to develop themselves through the opportunities provided for self-growth.

Furthermore, high performing employees are recognised and rewarded for their contribution.

“I think the people will contribute strongly when they have a stake in the bank, feel that they are growing and feel that the bank cares for them,” explains Tan Sri Azman.

“We have taken pains to continually ensure that staff feel connected – to one another, to customers and to the organisation.”

The bank conducts surveys to obtain feedback from employees on their thoughts and opinions about their work and career.

“Our people initiatives and programmes focus on our engagement drivers as a response to what employees say are important to them. These ensure that employees remain motivated and engaged and can perform well,” he adds.

DEVELOPMENT ON ALL FRONTS

“We believe that our staff must be trained to face the constantly changing and sophisticated demands of today’s business climate. Quality service can only be achieved if all staff are equipped with cutting edge knowledge and expertise,” he says.

The group provides many avenues and opportunities for learning via e-learning, in-house programmes, external workshops and conferences.

“We strongly emphasise that staff should not only be committed to their jobs, but also strive to continuously update and upgrade their knowledge and skills to be able to compete in the marketplace,” says Tan Sri Azman.

Those who seek to improve their public speaking skills can join the Toastmasters Club at AmBank Group.

There is also Kelab AmBank Group, the group’s sports club, which encourages staff to participate in a wide range of activities to promote a healthy mind and body, whilst bonding with one another.

“We also have ongoing employee engagement activities organised by the company and the sports club,” he continues.

“These are important events to create a sense of togetherness and promote interaction amongst employees of AmBank Group.”

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

Be it fresh graduates or experienced hires, the group is always on the lookout for professional, vibrant, resilient, agile and ambitious candidates who have a positive outlook, are willing to go the extra mile, and are on the lookout for challenges.

There are opportunities awaiting high achievers through various programmes aligned to specific sectors in the financial services industry.

These programmes accelerate the learning curve of individuals and enable them to shape their careers in the financial services sector. It provides exposure to diverse areas in AmBank Group.

As for experienced hires, high performers are assessed, developed and managed through the group’s talent management programme, which opens up avenues for leadership development and career advancement.

EMPLOYEES SERVING THE COMMUNITY

As a person who believes in giving back to society and one who has contributed his fair share to the community, Tan Sri Azman stresses the importance the group places on corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

“We strive to stay connected to the community by reaching out to society with compassion and remaining committed to addressing a wide range of issues.

“These include helping the underprivileged, those in distress situations, as well as supporting the development of youth, sports, culture, and the media.”

“At the same time, the group continues to contribute to healthy intellectual growth through various initiatives such as educational programmes and industry conferences.”

The group promotes a spirit of volunteerism amongst employees.

Staff frequently give their time to initiatives such as food distribution to the homeless under the Kechara Soup Kitchen programme.

To date, AmBank Group has also spent RM300,000 sponsoring life jackets for fishermen and others in flood prone areas.

The AmKasih Programme is the umbrella for the AmBank Group’s CSR initiatives for the community at large, irrespective of race, creed or religion, as it contributes to the sustainable development of the community it operates in.

Charity programmes for homes and schools, and treating less fortunate children to festive shopping and food during major festive seasons are only the tip of the iceberg of the group’s programmes.

Some other prominent activities include: AmBank-Mykasih Community Programme – This is a joint project with MyKasih Foundation to provide food aid to low-income households.

Since 2009, AmBank Group has also contributed RM1mil annually to the programme and supports communities in 16 locations nationwide.

Back To School Charity Programme – This annual programme buys school uniforms, backpacks, stationery and shoes for children from selected homes and schools during the year-end school holidays as they are about to enter the new school year.

Annual Countdown Celebration – “AMBANG 2014 PUTRAJAYA” is the ninth in the series of countdown concerts held on New Year’s Eve.

In the spirit of 1Malaysia, it brings Malaysians together, with entertainment by popular Malaysian artists. Attendance at the last few events have averaged more than 500,000.

Supporting Education – AmBank Group’s contribution of RM5mil for the AmBank Financial Services Chair in Universiti Malaya is one example of its initiatives in support of education.

Here, a chair holder is appointed to promote academic leadership and knowledge in the field of financial services.

Among the chair’s various responsibilities, he or she imparts knowledge and expertise through lectures, seminars and workshops to academics and students.

AmBank Group today stands proud as a homegrown entity that has reached many milestones throughout its long history.

Even through tough economic climates, it has managed not only to sustain itself, but to continue to grow.
I have been with AmBank Group for more than three years and I must say that it has been a fantastic journey. I am involved mainly in non-mortar commercial underwriting matters for agency distribution. I am also involved in training potential marketers on non-mortar commercial insurance segments. Working for AmBank Group has been an eye opener for me as we are trained to serve our customers with our group’s core values of being principled, having a proactive approach, knowing how to be appreciative, staying connected and most importantly, constantly evolving to improve our business. Besides that, I have very warm, friendly colleagues and we always work well as a team. At AmBank Group, I strongly believe that with my passion and drive, the sky is the limit and I would definitely encourage people with potential to join us.

EDMUND TAY KIM JOO
ACCOUNT’S RELATIONSHIP MANAGER

Coming from an accounting background, I never expected to join the banking line. After resigning from one of the big audit firms, I got a call to be a part of AmBank Group. I knew nothing about banking but my superior and the management were kind enough to explain the mechanics of my first role and my career path from there. I guess that is what every organisation should provide an employee with, a career path, not just a job. It has been an amazing six years for me in AmBank Group as I have not only been able to learn about the banking industry but other sectors as well, such as property development and investment, and plantations and the manufacturing industry. The bank is constantly improving and keeps in touch with its employees through its employee engagement initiatives. There are always improvements after these initiatives, and rewards and recognition have been fair as well. AmBank Group listens to its employees and invests in them.

RUDRAN SIVAYANAPOOPATHY
GROUP INTERNAL AUDIT MANAGER

AmBank Group is a vibrant organisation that provides plenty of opportunities to learn and grow one’s career. Capabilities and efforts do not go unnoticed and are applauded with rewards and recognition in both monetary and non-monetary forms. It has been a challenging yet exciting experience, considering how the group has grown over the past few years, but it has been a great learning experience. Personally, I have progressed from an executive to being a manager within five years. Each year has provided me the platform to develop my personal skills, knowledge and capabilities, whilst assuming a position of greater responsibility. My job scope entails assisting the audit director and associate audit director in managing the portfolio of Group Shared Services audit assignments. This includes planning and leading audit assignments of these functions, as well as engaging in staff development and training activities.

SHAHRIOL HISHAM TAHR
HEAD OF AUTO FINANCE

I manage the automotive financing business, in line with the overall strategic development of improving AmBank Group’s market share, customer base and profitability. I am proud to say that we are one of Malaysia’s leading car financiers. I have been with the bank for more than 15 years now, holding various roles in different departments during my tenure here. I embarked on my journey with AmBank Group in 1997 during the Asian financial crisis and meltdown. I chose AmBank Group as it was a relatively new bank then with promising dynamism, and what I foresaw as having a lot of room for expansion, in terms of both the retail banking business and my career growth. My career has been progressing tremendously and I have to credit that to the support from the senior management throughout the banking group. While strong foundations have been laid out to ensure strong banking fundamentals, the career path, clarity of the employees and performance management are all strong contributors towards the personal development and career growth of the staff.

ANGIE WONG CHENG YEE
HEAD, INTEGRATED CAMPAIGNS - SEGMENT STRATEGY & MANAGEMENT

At AmBank Group, I strongly believe that employees are an asset and are its greatest resource. It has been a fantastic journey. I have been with AmBank Group for nine years and I am proud to say that we are one of Malaysia’s leading car financiers. I have been with the bank for more than 15 years now, holding various roles in different departments during my tenure here. I embarked on my journey with AmBank Group in 1997 during the Asian financial crisis and meltdown. I chose AmBank Group as it was a relatively new bank then with promising dynamism, and what I foresaw as having a lot of room for expansion, in terms of both the retail banking business and my career growth. My career has been progressing tremendously and I have to credit that to the support from the senior management throughout the banking group. While strong foundations have been laid out to ensure strong banking fundamentals, the career path, clarity of the employees and performance management are all strong contributors towards the personal development and career growth of the staff.

RAKHEE REKHRAJ
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS GROUP

I joined the bank back in 2004 as a trainee under the Securities Commission Graduate Trainee Programme and worked my way up the corporate ladder to the position of an associate director. I have been a part of the bank for nine years now and this has come with more responsibilities as well as opportunities. This is inclusive of managing my own team and being involved in various risk related projects. My role includes evaluating the credit risk of new credit applications and credit reviews for approval by the Credit and Commitments Committee of the group. With the various opportunities given for staff to learn via “on-the-job” training, training programmes and ample interaction between the bosses and the junior staff, I believe that I will be able to grow professionally in my current area of expertise. This will also enable me to expand my banking knowledge and provide me with opportunities to venture into other areas.

MARK LIM POH KHEONG
REGIONAL FIELD UNDERWRITER

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AmBank Group has the most number of ATM machines at 7-Eleven stores.

The AmBank-ANZ Get Set Solution is a solution which offers students intending to study in Australia the convenience of pre-opening an ANZ Access Advantage student account in Malaysia to facilitate fund transfers.

AmGeneral Insurance Berhad, which comprises the combined business of AMI Insurance Berhad and AIA General Insurance (Malaysia) Berhad, is now the country’s largest motor insurer.

In terms of sports and recreation, AmBank Group has one of the most active sports clubs, Kelab AmBank Group (KAG) amongst financial institutions in the country.

It also has a collection of over 300 paintings in various mediums, showcasing the talents of many Malaysian artists.

Lat, the celebrated Malaysian cartoonist collaborated with the AmBank Group (then known as the Arab-Malaysian Banking Group) from 1994-1999 to produce humorous depictions of products and services, as well as the company itself.

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GO AHEAD, TAKE CHARGE
YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN LIFE

Our behaviour is a function of our decisions. Not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values, have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen.

By EVAs CHRISTODOULOU

Being proactive is clearly easier said than done. Although now and again we would like to be proactive, there is always a stumbling block.

The number of obstacles that hinder people from being proactive.

1. WROUNG MINDS

We are often reactive rather than proactive. We respond to the situation as it happens instead of planning ahead of it. We don’t always take the initiative to tackle things with this kind of perspective. People with this mindset tend to blame their circumstances.

“Finding fault to blame for their behaviour,” says Stephen Covey. “They think that you are a victim if you experience something that is unpleasant. You can do something about it, so it is not your fault.”

2. KEEPING YOUR COMMITMENTS

The circle of influence is our ability to make and keep commitments and promises. The commitments we make to ourselves, our family, friends, colleagues and so on. It is the essence of what we stand for. If we accept that we can learn new methods, we will come closer to being proactive. We respond to the situation, rather than allowing others to influence us.

3. DISTRACTIONS

In this era, we are more distracted than ever from electronic devices to social media. Our minds are more distracted than ever from our surroundings and the people around us. We need to be proactive.

4. BEHAVIOUR

We can set ourself up to be sick, or you can choose to stay well,” says Wayne Swan. “We can choose to wait till it falls sick or we can proactively work to keep ourselves healthy. The way we behave in a situation will influence the way we behavour.

How do we accomplish that? For one, we need to break that cycle of changing our behaviour. We need to break that cycle of changing our behaviour by dealing with it effectively.

5. HOW TO BE MORE PROACTIVE

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FISHING FOR PROACTIVITY

BY EVELYN TEH
evelyn.teh@leaderonomics.com

ET’S start with a scenario. Kathy has been feeling stressed at work lately due to a new problem she is facing. She feels like she is not making any progress in her role. There are standard operating procedures (SOP) on how to solve the issue but she also feels that they do not provide solutions to her problem. Her direct manager is away on a business trip and will not be back for two weeks. Yet, she needs to find a solution within the week. What should Kathy do?

A — Call her direct manager and ask for solutions
B — Follow all SOPs on how to solve the problem
C — Create an entirely new way of solving the problem
D — Use the SOP where necessary while involving novel solutions, where applicable.

IF YOU WERE KATHY, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

"Where necessary" and "where applicable" are some words that are discouraging for leaders as they figure out how to encourage employees to be more proactive in tackling problems, and balance applying rules and attempting innovation. “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a lifetime,” goes the saying. In this article, the “fish” is a metaphor for proactivity. How can leaders encourage proactivity in their respective organisations, and catch the “fish”?

PROACTIVITY

It is almost impossible to find a one-size-fits-all definition of proactivity but the common conceptualisation revolves around behaviours that are anticipatory, self-initiated and making a difference. Research shows that benefits of being proactive are endless; ranging from personal career success to better organisational commitment and increased job satisfaction and engagement. On organisational levels, it has resulted in higher levels of organisational commitment and increased productivity. This is probably not surprising since being proactive allows employees to exert autonomy and craft their careers to fit their strengths and working styles.

In an era of knowledge-based organisations where interdependence for information is found at every level and performance is increasingly determined by less tangible factors (i.e. relationships, flexibility, interpersonal skills), proactivity is as crucial as competence.

THE DARK SIDE

Nevertheless, research by Belchak and Den Hartog shows that under certain conditions, proactivity may not always be a blessing. A key downside to proactivity could be increased work pressure and mental stress of employees since it requires them to go above and beyond their roles. Moreover, employees who over-anticipating or moving too quickly without time to reflect may find themselves living the organisational bane of “reacting rather than responding”. This can lead to increased tension in the atmosphere where everyone is trying to outdo each other and firefight before there is actually any fire. In addition, proactivity taken to extremes can lead to employees being singled out as deviant or a complainer for always voicing their opinions. Finally, organisations run the risk of extreme reliance on employees’ proactivity as opposed to institutionalising reliable processes—a common issue in startups.

Referring to Kathy’s situation, optimally the answer would be D; but what can we do to foster D as a choice? Let’s look at some lessons from two interesting areas to draw lessons that can be adapted.

1. How to Fish as an Individual – The Agile Learner

One definition of learning agility by the Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL) is having a mindset that pushes leaders to continually develop and adopt new strategies that will equip them for increasingly complex problems faced in their organisation. CCL suggests that learning agility is not a fixed disposition and can be encouraged through four key behavioural enablers (Innovating, Performing, Reflecting, Risking) and one behavioural derailer (Defending). Agile learners make sense in knowledge-based organisations because of increasing uncertainty and complexity in today’s work environments, as such as in Kathy’s situation.

In return, being an agile learner also encourages proactivity because it allows employees to anticipate situations. It increases their flexibility and allows employees to be resourceful. By having a trusted base of data for exchange and collaboration, coupled with a psychologically safe environment becomes a go-to platform for encouraging proactivity among employees as they are better able to decide and take the “where applicable”, “where necessary” risks.

2. How to Fish as an Organisation – Execution-as-Learning

Execution-as-learning is an interesting concept put forth by researcher Amy C. Edmonson, whose research shows that instilling learning as part of the organisational process is a better execution style, especially for knowledge organisations. In this framework, leaders act as inspirational figures who articulate the mission. Tentative work processes are guidelines and continuous streams of information are provided to ensure employees are always equipped to solve problem.

Edmonson suggests that in order for this framework to occur in an organisation, there needs to be psychological safety. What this means is that employees feel a sense of courage to take risks because there is no interpersonal risk of being ridiculed or fear of failure. She also focuses on a few key steps to build this framework focusing on organisational aspects of data and infrastructure for real-time collaboration. It is key to collect data especially when there are deviations from SOPs. This ensures that the guidelines are always updated to find the most suitable practices and reminds employees that they can make a difference.

As for real-time collaboration, organisations like Group Danone organise “Knowledge Marketplaces” to ensure exchanges of best practices, which reduces the burden on leaders as the only source of data. The bonus? It also encourages employees to be resourceful. By having process guidelines derived from best practices accumulated through various sources (i.e. experts, competitors, previous experience), routine action is simplified and nuances are highlighted in each case. Having a trusted base of data for employees to make their decision, coupled with a psychologically safe environment becomes a go-to platform for encouraging proactivity among employees as they are better able to decide and take the “where applicable”, “where necessary” risks.

THE ULTIMATE FISHING LESSON – LEARNING AS CULTURE

The concept of proactivity is something that needs to permeate the organisation at all levels including its individual employees, processes, policies and seen as continuous development. Going back to Kathy’s situation, just being an agile learner who practices innovating and risk-taking will probably encourage her to go for answer C. But add to that the influence of her organisation as one that encourages execution-as-learning, she is more likely to act on answer D because there is a strong base of real data guiding the SOPs that become input for her solution to the problem.

As Stephen Covey says, “Effective people are not problem-minded, they’re opportunity-minded. They see opportunities and stare problems.”

The shift to an opportunity mindset is a combined goal of both the individual and organisation. How will you teach fishing today?
By ROSHAN THIRAN

YOUR life doesn't just "happen." Or does it? For many people, life just goes by and we are "victims" of events, circumstances and situations. My friend who was an FBI hostage negotiator, George Kohlrieser, describes this "helpless" situation as being taken "hostage".

The truth is your life is carefully designed by you. Yes, you read that right — you! Each decision you make is all yours. Every moment, every situation, provides a new choice. And the choices you make determine your life.

A few years ago, someone came to me and lamented about the state of the person's life and how "unlucky" the person was. Everything that could go wrong had gone wrong. After a long state of moaning, I decided to help this person. So, I asked him to list down what were the key things he disliked with this life. His typical day went something like this.

"I woke up and knew I had to get lots of stuff done. So, I set the alarm to ensure I woke up on time. But when the alarm went off, I just had to sit there and hit snooze for a bit tired."

I knew that if I slept a bit more, my tiredness would subside and I would be much more productive. So, I slept on and then suddenly realised that it was already 10am. I quickly got up and knew I was very hungry as I had a long day with many things to accomplish.

"I quickly prepared some breakfast, fried some eggs. As I was about to fry the eggs, I realised I didn't have cooking oil. So, I quickly rushed to a grocery store to pick up the oil. I knew that I needed a good breakfast so that I could be productive. But as it was already almost 10:45am, I decided to have breakfast outside. Then I rushed back to get my work done."

"But it was already almost noon by the time I got back. I decided I will make some lunch so that I would not get distracted once I start work. By 1pm, I had cleaned up the kitchen and my lunch was ready. I decided to jump right into work."

"Within 10 minutes, my friend called me and started telling me about some interesting gossip. Not wanting to be rude, I listened to him but the call lasted until the big hour. I decided to have my lunch then. And I thought maybe I should watch some TV with lunch.""

"Before I knew it, I was 6pm. I knew I had to get my work done. So again, I started working on it but a few friends came over to the house and asked me to join them for a quick drink. I decided to join them and maybe grab dinner too (which would save me some time)."

"After dinner, I got back by 9pm and was pretty tired after the long day. But I knew I had to get my stuff done, so went to the computer to start work. But I saw my emails and started answering them. And some of them had links to really good YouTube videos."

"Before I knew it, it was almost midnight and I was extremely tired. I decided that I would wake up tomorrow and make sure I get my stuff done. I was determined to get things done."

As I heard his story (and this is quite a common story), I asked the person, "why do you think you have not achieved much so far?" and he answered again, "I am really unlucky. I never get the breaks like other people".

I could only smile and sigh. But the more people I asked to write out their calendars, the more I found this a common theme — we love to procrastinate and never make the hard choices that enable us to succeed.

Choosing to skip a movie to get work done, or choosing to not eat junk food to become healthy are little choices that we all make daily. And we can choose to be proactive. We can choose to eliminate all forms of procrastination from our lives.

ARE YOU IN CONTROL?

The choices you make will determine success or failure.

PROACTIVE FOLK NEVER WORRY ABOUT CONDITIONS IN WHICH THEY HAVE LITTLE OR NO CONTROL. THEY FOCUS ON AREAS WHICH THEY CAN CHANGE AND INFLUENCE.

BEING PROACTIVE

Being proactive is about taking responsibility for your life. You can't keep blaming everything on your boss or others. Proactive people recognise that they are "response-able." They don't blame events, circumstances, or other people for their behaviour. They know they choose their behaviour.

Reactive people, on the other hand, are often affected by external stimuli. They forget that they have the power to choose their response. Proactive people also tend to have positive language. They use words like "I can," "I will" and "I shall" whilst reactive folks tend to use language such as "I have to," "if only" and "I wish."

Proactive folk never worry about conditions in which they have little or no control. They focus on areas which they can change and influence.

The choices you make will determine success or failure.

"Be Proactive" is the No 1 habit from Stephen Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Covey believes that being proactive means taking conscious control over your life, setting goals and working to achieve them. Instead of reacting to events and waiting for opportunities, you go out and create your own events and opportunities.

According to Covey, there is a gap between stimulus and response, and within this gap lies the choice for our proactive response. Within this gap lie four special human endowments:

1. Self-awareness — the understanding that you do have a choice. If someone abuses you, you can choose to insult them back. If you are offered some junk food, you can choose not to accept it or eat it.

2. Conscience — the ability to consult your inner conscience to make right decisions for yourself based on your core principles and beliefs.

3. Creative imagination — the ability to envisage other possibilities. By using your mind’s eye, you can mentally produce alternate options.

4. Independent will — you do not have to conform to expectations of others but have the freedom to choose your own unique reaction.

STEPS TO BEING PROACTIVE

So, how do you become more proactive in everything you do? Chrispy Scivacque, a career expert and coach, claims there are 5Ps to proactive success. According to her, these will help you be effective at work.

1. Predict — Learn to anticipate problems and events. Understand how things work — patterns, routines and natural cycles that exist in your business. Never become complacent. Never expect the past to be an accurate predictor for the future.

2. Plan — Proactive people plan for the future. Write down your plans. This is key to ensuring your plans get executed and completed.

3. Prevent — Proactive people foresee potential obstacles (like feeling tired, friends calling you for drinks etc) and find ways to overcome them before those barriers turn into major issues that hinder your progress.

Write out your game plan to overcome these key barriers/obstacles (i.e if a friend calls me to go for a drink, I will say I will come over once I am done) that may hinder you from accomplishing your actions.

4. Participate — Never idly observe. Get involved and take initiative. Always be part of a solution and not the problem.

5. Perform — Being proactive means taking timely effective action. Take ownership of your performance and hold yourself accountable.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Proactiveness simply is being responsible for our own lives. Remember, our behaviour is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. Are you a proactive person? Or are you still a "hostage" who is forced to be reactive to circumstances, situations and people? You can decide today to choose to be proactive. It is just that — a choice!

Roshan Thiran is CEO of Leaderonomics, a social enterprise with a mission of transforming the nation through leadership development. To follow Roshan on Twitter (and his constant tweets on proactivot) follow his handle “lepaker” or via Facebook at www.facebook.com/roshanthiran.
CURIOUSITY IS GOOD

APPROVAL CAN BUILD A CHILD’S CONFIDENCE

By PREMA JAYABALAN
prema.jayabalan@leaderonomics.com

CHILDREN are curious beings. They question, explore, and wonder when they learn. From the moment of birth, people are drawn to new things. When we are curious about something, we want to explore it. And while exploring it, we discover.

Children are born with a rage to learn. They want to learn about everything and want to learn about it right now. Children naturally think that learning is great. However, they spend the first six years of life being told that learning is not the greatest thing in life. Playing is. But isn’t playing the best form of learning?

By turning the light switch on and off, over and over again, the toddler learns about cause and effect. By pouring water into different-shaped containers, the three-year-old is learning the concepts of mass and volume. In eating, a child experiences the sweetness of chocolate, the bitterness of lemon, the heat of the radiator, and the cold of ice.

LEARNING CYCLE

If a child continues to be curious, he will always explore and discover. The pre-schooler finds tadpoles in a tiny pool of mud on the playground. This discovery excites him. When he experiences the fun in discovery, he will want to repeat his exploration of the pond. Each day, the children will return to explore the tadpoles grow legs. The children learn that tadpoles become frogs – an example of a biological process. Mastery – in this case, figuring out that tadpoles become frogs – leads to confidence.

Confidence increases the desire to act on curiosity – to explore, discover, and learn. Can we bring tadpoles into class for everyone to see? How do other animals grow? Why don’t puppies lose their tails?” This interesting cycle of learning is fueled by curiosity and the joy that comes from discovery and mastery.

SHARING IS CARING

What is most pleasing about discovery and mastery is sharing it with others. (“Teacher, come here! Look, tadpoles!”)

We are social beings. The most positive reinforcement comes from admiration, comments and support from someone we love and respect. The teacher smiles, claps, and comments, “Wow, look at all these tadpoles! You are our little science geniuses!”

This rewarding gesture causes a surge of pleasure and pride that can sustain the child through new challenges and frustrations. Approval can help build confidence and self-esteem. So later in the day when this child is struggling with mathematics, rather than bumming his esteem by thinking, “I’m dumb, I don’t understand,” he will think, “I don’t get this, but will because I’m the one who found out about tadpoles.”

CONSTRICING CURIOSITY

For many children, curiosity fades away. As the saying goes, curiosity dimmed is a future denied. Our potential – body, mind and soul – is expressed through our experiences. And the less-curious child will make fewer friends, join fewer social networks, read fewer books, and take fewer hikes.

When he/she joins the workforce in the future, they may well be one of those who don’t interact well with others. Lack of inclination to be curious and fear of asking questions, can result in lack of confidence as an adult. There are three common ways adults constrict or dampen the fascinating exploration of the curious child.

Absence: The presence of a caring, interested adult provides two things essential for maximum exploration: a sense of safety to discover new things and the ability and space to share the discovery and get acknowledged for it.

Disapproval: “Don’t touch this. Don’t climb that. Don’t shout at him. Don’t break it. Don’t. Don’t. Don’t.” Children sense and respond to our attitudes. If we convey a message of disgust at the mud on their shoes and the slime on their hands, their love to discover tadpoles will fade away.

Fear: Fear kills curiosity. When a child is afraid, he will not like anything new. He will seek the familiar, stay in his comfort zone, not leave and explore new territories. Children impacted by war, natural disasters, family distress, or violence all have their curiosity diminished.

LETTING BLOSSOM

Be aware of individual differences in children’s styles of curiosity. Some explore only with their minds, others in physical ways – smelling, touching, tasting, and climbing. To some extent, these differences are related to the variety of temperaments. Some children are timid; others are very comfortable with physical exploration. However, even the timid child will be curious; just that he may require more encouragement to leave safe and familiar situations.

Curiosity often leads to mess than mastery, but it’s how we handle the mess that helps encourage further exploration, and development.

All we have to do is redefine failure. When the five-year-old is learning to jump rope and he trips a thousand times, it is not failing repeatedly – it is determination.

Use your attention and acknowledgment to reinforce the exploring child. When exploration in the classroom is disruptive or inappropriate, teach the child when and where to do that kind of exploration: “Let’s play with water outside.”

Mark Twain once said “I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.” If we let them, children can reintroduce us to the world.

When we truly allow a child to share his discoveries with us, we experience the joys of rediscovery – and in doing so, learn ourselves.

In the quest to produce an innovative and productive workforce in the future, it is imperative for parents to start cultivating curiosity in children at a young age.

HOW TO RAISE INQUISTIVE CHILDREN

1. INSTILL COMPETENCE

Most of us feel that if the child can identify mysterious, interesting and complex elements, then they are curious. However, that is not the case and it is certainly not enough. Children need to feel that they can identify mysterious, interesting and complex elements, then they are interested. We have to do this by providing opportunities for them to build skills that will enable this to happen. One way to go about this is to give constructive feedback on their progress. Besides that, give them time to play without the pressure of not making mistakes and the fear of failure. Throw in praise when necessary.

2. TRAIN THEM TO BE FLEXIBLE

Teach your child to think and do things in a flexible manner. This can be achieved by getting them to look at things from all angles rather than thinking that there is only one way to go about things.

They need to know that they can view facts from multiple perspectives and that there is never a dead end. For example, if your child asks if human beings today are much more clever than 1,000 years ago, don’t answer yes or no. The honest answer is “it depends.”

A lot of principles and things practised by people today were derived and found during ancient times. By giving them this honest answer, it will train them to think hard and stretch their knowledge and skills to the limit. Why not even choose a whole new activity? A new activity provides a new challenge for them as they have to learn it, practise and eventually master it. It opens up an avenue for them to use their brains to the fullest to come up with solutions for the tasks that are involved, thus enhancing their abilities think out of the box.

3. IMBUE CHALLENGE

Put in a regular dosage of challenge into your child’s activities. Most of the time, we choose activities that are easy for our children to do, in the name of wanting them to be in control and feel intelligent. Change that.

Assist them in choosing activities that require them to think hard and stretch their knowledge and skills to the limit. Why not even choose a whole new activity?

A new activity provides a new challenge for them as they have to learn it, practise and eventually master it. It opens up an avenue for them to use their brains to the fullest to come up with solutions for the tasks that are involved, thus enhancing their abilities think out of the box. 
By TARCAYANI PREBAGARAN
mystarjob@leaderonomics.com

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When we are speaking to someone, we can
be naturally born with. While carefully ob-
serving the skills that you obtain, you might find what
you truly love doing.

To find your passion, recognise and
acknowledge these talents. It could be
writing, speaking, drawing or even
listening emphatically to someone.
You will be amazed at what you
are able to find by reflecting on yourself
deeply.

2. Don’t restrict yourself to “the passion”
You can have more than one
passion in life. Work towards
aligning your passions with opportunities that
come along.

Sometimes when we are too
worked up about finding “the pas-
sion”, we may lose motivation espe-
cially when we are interested in more
than one thing.
You can always combine your tal-
ents and interests. For example, if you
are passionate about entrepreneur-
ship and also healthy living, you can
optimise both your passions by per-
haps starting up a juice bar.

3. What and who inspires you?
Look closely in elements of your life
such as the books and magazines you
are reading, the blogs you follow, the
section of bookstores you usually grav-
itate towards, where you enjoy going
and even what makes you laugh.

Do this often and try to find a com-
mon theme. Understand what inspires
you and why are you constantly
inclined towards these things.
When you are speaking to some-
one, what are the topics of the con-
versation that make you light up or
curiously engaged?

There are usually certain things that
you really enjoy speaking about. When
you are discovering these things, be
sure to do it genuinely with your heart
rather than your head.

Besides that, do think about role
models that have always inspired you.
Think of their journey and ask yourself
if you would enjoy doing it.

4. Go back in time
Ask yourself what you loved
doing as a child. What were the
activities that you were completely
immersed in and brought you joy?
It can be anything, from books to
aeroplanes. Everyone has an inner
child in them, very much linked to
childhood.

Your inner child will give you a clue
on what you are truly passionate
about. Don’t be cynical about it.

Take time out from your busy day
and sit down and really think about
what you loved doing as a child and
what you secretly always wanted to
do.

It is also helpful to jot these
thoughts down and when you look
back at it you might discover a recur-
ing idea or theme that will bring you
to your passion.

A contrarian approach to finding
and following your passion is, falling
into passion.

In many cases, passion is developed
slowly and often over complicated
paths. It takes years of effort in a
particular field to be good at it before
actually being passionate about it.
Young people, especially, begin to
feel inadequate or hate their jobs early
in their careers because early years
talent tough times of skill building.
This is seen as contradicting the
notion of “following your passion,”
seem to imply a perfect job that you
will love right away.

Cal Newport, author of So Good
They Can’t Ignore You says that if he
had subscribed to the “follow your
passion” orthodoxy, he would have
left in his first few years as it worried
him that he didn’t feel love for his job
every day.

However, he knew that his sense of
fulfilment would grow over time as he
became better at his job and eventu-
ally he became passionate about the
work he did.

His advice for young people is that
passion is not something you follow.
It’s something that will follow you as
you put in the hard work to become
valuable to the world.

So whether you choose to find your
passion or fall into your passion, the
crucial aspect is to quit thinking about
it and start doing something about it.
Don’t wait for circumstances to be
right but rather be proactive and be
willing to invest time, effort and per-
sistent focus.
It is truly a rewarding experience to
be able to find your passion and live
passionately. Passion is what keeps
you going when the going gets tough.

Quoting Benjamin Disraeli, a 19th
century British Prime Minister, “Man is
only great when he acts from passion”.

1. Invest time and energy in finding your passion
Be alert about the things that you
are interested about. Ask yourself difficult
questions and be honest with the
answers.

2. Don’t restrict yourself to “the passion”
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Dive deeper into these skills that you
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DEAR CAREE Nexom ers
I am a 33-year-old HR practitioner who joined the insurance industry five years ago. I am certain that I did well in the couple of assignments and projects I was involved in during my first two years with the organisation.
This was reinforced by my boss who said that I did good work and write well. At that point of joining the company, my boss said that she wanted to make me a manager in two years.
However, in five years, I only got one miserable promotion, within the same job rank, i.e., assistant manager. My boss has recently given me two more years to be manager.
I am no longer giving my best at work due to the following:
1. I am bored with my job; I feel that work is not meaningful and I want to own a bigger portfolio;
2. My boss says that my bad temper at work is hindering my career growth; I am uncertain if I can ever get up the corporate ladder in this organisation as my boss is giving me excuses not to promote me.
3. I have been looking for other jobs recently and have been to a few interviews. However, they were all futile as I was either not cut out for the job, or my salary expectations were too high. I have made it a point to change my bad temper and my effort was acknowledged by my boss.
4. I am now at the crossroads of my career, and my life. Looking back at my work over the years, I am positive that I am capable and adept at doing more. I have the necessary qualifications, I am able to lead my juniors and my experience would certainly make me a suitable candidate for a promotion, all the more since my immediate superior has been tasked to another major assignment.

Please advise. Thank you.
JAYMEE

DEAR JAYMEE,

Being at a crossroads, be it career or life – is always frustrating. Stagnation as opposed to action brings about feelings of uncertainty and the lack of inertia in turn promotes low energy and helplessness. Inevitably, we become stuck in a rut.

Based on your sharing, it is clear that you are aware of the root cause of the problem – an advancement opportunity which you were denied. When I see cases of people not meeting their superior’s expectations and targets set for me, I apply this framework to try to gauge the root cause and find a solution to the problem.

Say, a boss says to his employee (A) “Sorry you can’t be promoted because you are not meeting our performance expectations.”

It’s important to see how A responds because it will point us towards the root cause.

Scenario 1: His response is “I can’t do it!” – this indicates A does not have the right tools to deliver on the job, so an assessment of the right work tools is needed and he should be provided with what is needed (e.g. smart phone, data access, systems access, etc.)

Scenario 2: His response is “I don’t know how!” – this indicates lack of knowledge or skills. For lack of knowledge, a coaching or teaching session is required to help A. For lack of skill, a hands on training/ experience learning type session is required.

Scenario 3: His response is “I won’t do it!” – this indicates an attitude issue and perhaps misalignment of values between the individual’s preference and the organisation’s aspirations. In such cases it is wise to part ways.

Scenario 4: His response is “I am not!” – this indicates A is genuinely surprised that he is not meeting expectations.

In the way he perceives things, he has been consistently delivering work up to the mark and when sprung with such news he is genuinely surprised and feels victimised.

Coming back to your situation Jaymee, perhaps you have not been provided with feedback about your current performance.

I am sure you are open to receiving feedback that will help you improve in specific ways to attain your goal of being a manager.

It seems in this case that the quality and frequency of that feedback was insufficient.

Good feedback (positive reinforcement and constructive criticism) are powerful tools to spur your performance and give meaning to a person’s contribution to the team and organisation.

You see this on TV in any major sporting events from football right to gymnastics – the coach or some- times a team of coaches will be continuously providing feedback from the sidelines.

Once the game is done, a care- ful post-mortem is conducted and constructive criticism (outside the limelight) is given to help improve for the next game.

I have been extremely lucky to have had great bosses throughout my career in the corporate world who have provided me with a lot of solid feedback. This has helped me grow professionally and in my personal life.

Perhaps it’s time for you to find a mentor or someone you aspire to be in your organisation.

Ask if he or she will mentor you and give you feedback to help you grow and develop yourself to your full potential. I feel once you have someone to do this for you, you will feel more empowered to take on new challenges be it in your current role or elsewhere.

All the best, Jaymee.
RUPA SIVANONI

DEAR JAYMEE,

It can be concluded that you are capable in your job and have been acknowledged for it.

You want to do more, you are confident that you can do more, and have the necessary qualifica- tions. You are able to manage people and even replace your immedi- ate superior.

Unfortunately, it is claimed that you have a bad temper. The good thing is, you are working on it.

Additionally, your temper is con- stantly being used as the reason to prolong your promotion. And there is still no guarantee that in another two years you will be manager.

The questions that come to mind are, if it takes two years for you to be promoted to manager (again, there is no guarantee based on pre- vious events):

1. Would everything be solved thereafter?
2. Are there opportunities within the organisation for you to leverage on to build upon your capabilities in the two years (or more)?
3. Is the current organisation worth the wait?

If you are looking out for new opportunities, you have to be dedi- cated and never take your foot off the pedal.

Check the websites of potential employers for vacancies and recruit othes to help you in locating suit- able jobs.

You might be lucky and find a recruitment consultancy willing to work hard for you.

Going direct to a potential employer is likely to be the more effective route for you.

Also think about whether you’d be prepared to take the risk of a fixed term contract role or specialis- ing in certain aspects of HR as com- pared to a generalist role.

It is best to make your own opportunities. If you are just wait- ing for a promised opportunity, you may find that the promised oppor- tunity is a long time coming.

Regards,
SHOBA KESAVAN

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

Also next week

How much stress is too much? What can you do about it?
Stretch your people to their fullest potential but don’t break them
The Stig from Top Gear on how to manage pressure
Tips on how to keep your cool from the film ‘Anger Management’