HARNESSING DIVERSITY

DRIVING PERFORMANCE THROUGH A RICH MIX
PAGES 4-7
WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A COMPANY AND BAKING?

WHEN I look at the Leaderonomics team, we’re about as diverse as many companies can get. Our team of 40 something people includes individuals who provide leadership development services to corporations, NGOs, university students, youth, kids, and to the public en masse via media platforms like this weekly pullout. Our offerings are as diverse as the people behind it all. We have employees who grew up in different countries but have now made Malaysia their home and others who left global organisations to join the company. Corporate Services is filled with individuals from backgrounds in finance, media, sales and research. The media division includes people from law, languages, accounting and marketing. There are even individuals from graphic design and biology in the youth team. Now that’s diverse.

At first glance, even as I write this, this should be a recipe for disaster. It’s like using four kinds of eggs in a cake recipe and five types of flour. Uniformity spells predictability. Predictability equates to blandness. Even if pages 6-7 tell us that the way they work and am reminded I have far to go.

So while badly-managed (often meaning unacknowledged) diversity may be a problem, most people I talk to say that it’s great because we are all unique. – Stephen R. Covey

Without diversity life would be very boring. – Malcolm Forbes

“Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.” – Stephen R. Covey

“Diversity: the art of thinking independently together.” – Malcolm Forbes

Identifying misalignments. If a core value is motivating and supporting employee creativity and participation, a great example is creating a suggestion box in all areas of the office, be it in the corridors, meeting rooms or the pantry where ideas can pop up.

3 IDENTIFY YOUR CORE VALUES

Your goal is to seek and hire people who are willing to share your core values. Although employees may come from diverse backgrounds, they must also be able to share the set of values your company has. Ask employees these questions: What are the core values you carry to work? Can you visualise these values being brought forth into the next decade or century? Can this organisation hold on to these values in the future? Practices and strategies change, core values don’t.

4 DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN VALUES, SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES

Collins writes that “Timeloss core values should never change; operating practices and cultural norms should never stop changing.”

For example, a core value that never changes in an academic institution is the growth of one’s knowledge and intellect. The practice that supports this core value is academic tenure. Although your core values and goals should be properly fixed, your procedures, policies, structures, systems and everything else have to be open to change.

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The opinions expressed in this career guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.
Following the diagram and Blanchard et al’s explanation, those that fall in the category of enthusiastic beginners, need a directive style. This may not necessarily be true for all parts of their job, though.

As an effective leader you will need to make a fair assessment of the situation. Focus on the part that is new for them, and that they are really excited about getting into – in the marketing team example given earlier, imagine a fresh graduate who has some experience in teamwork and planning due to internships, but is new to identifying new ways of marketing and finding target audience specific ideas that could work.

For this aspect of the job, show them how it needs to be done from beginning to end, and lay out a step-by-step plan for their self-development. You should be involved in teaching them how to do things, provide them the direction, supervise them, plan and prioritise their tasks and targets.

Team members that would come under the disillusioned learners category, would need a coaching style. You need to provide a leadership style that is high on direction and support. Continue to direct and closely monitor their progress, but at the same time also engage them in more two-way conversations going back and forth between your advice and their questions and suggestions.

At this development level, you’ll need to provide a lot of praise and support to build up their confidence and restore their commitment, while at the same time still making the final decisions since they are still learning. For those that are assessed as capable but cautious performers, a supporting style is necessary. This would include little direction but lots of support to encourage them to stand their ground. Listen to their concerns and suggestions, and support their interactions with clients and colleagues. Encourage and praise them, but restrain yourself from directing their actions.

Feedback should also become more of a give-and-take process. Help them reach solutions by asking them questions that would expand their thinking and encourage risk taking rather than feed them the answers.

Finally, for those that graduate to self-reliant achievers, try to adopt a delegating style. Turn over responsibility for day-to-day decision making to them. Empower them by allowing them to act independently. Acknowledge their excellent performance and provide them with the resources they need to carry on with their work, and challenge them so that they continue to grow.

It is important to highlight that development levels are task and goal specific. This means you might need different leadership styles for different people, but also different styles for different aspects of their roles. As Blanchard et al puts it, “Leaders need to do what the people they supervise can’t do for themselves at the present moment.”

In order to become effective in using situational leadership, according to Blanchard et al, you must master three key skills:

1. **DIAGNOSIS**
   You should be able to assess your team members’ competences as well as their commitment to their tasks.

2. **FLEXIBILITY**
   You should be able to switch between leadership styles from individual to individual, and also when an individual moves from one development level to the next. Research conducted by Blanchard et al indicated that 54% of leaders tend to use a uniform style of leadership irrespective of development levels observed, 35% of them can switch between two styles, 10% can alternate between three styles, whereas only 1% of them can alternate between the ideal four styles discussed.

3. **COMMUNICATION**
   Finally, it is crucial to have sufficient communication between you and the team members. They need to understand your rationale behind the way you manage them.

Gain their permission to use the leadership style that is a match to their situation at any given time, so that they do not get confused and disillusioned further when observing your behaviour changing either towards them, or the rest of the team members.

Diversity exists in all aspects of our work and life. Situational leadership, therefore, applies to all facets of our lives and career as well. We can use it on leading individuals, a team, an organisation, and perhaps more importantly, ourselves.

Blanchard and Hersey’s model can be taken as a guide to how we need to learn to be more flexible and willing to adjust according to circumstances. And that is perhaps the key to managing diversity – being able to bend your ideas and allow space to new concepts and challenges that come your way.

As a leader, you will be the first that has to do away with the old and allow the new conditions in place to determine the trajectory of your leadership style and the organisation.

As such, aim to mould yourself into new situations quite easily. There is nothing more crucial than the ability to adapt easily in today’s fast changing world. By mastering the ability to move from one leadership style to the next, you can give your team – and yourself – a very vital advantage.

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By VINESH NAIDU
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IM Collins famously put forth the idea that it doesn’t matter who the person is; get the best guy on the bus and it will reach the Promised Land. Somewhere.

I think we have to balance it by asking a slightly different question. It probably shouldn’t always be “Is he or she the right person for the job?” Tweak it and ask “Is he or she the right person for the team?”

There have been studies on what aids leadership development in an organisation, and one key focus in the latest trend is workplace or workforce diversity.

Diversity, as it relates to the workforce, and amongst others, refers to the mix of people, background and skills needed to achieve the organisation’s goals.

There exists the viewpoint that it’s easier to manage a workforce that’s homogeneous and culturally alike, thus solving the issue of integration and cohesion.

But come on, we are talking about humans here. After all and unless you are part of Pitt and Jolie’s clan who are like the poster-family for diversity in motion, sometimes even siblings don’t get along!

So, I am going to argue that a diverse workforce is actually an advantage to companies rather than a hindrance. Let’s discuss the surrounding issues.

Nietzsche, the German philosopher once said that “the surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in a higher esteem those who think alike, than those who think differently”.

The frequency of innovation has sped up in the past 10 years. Plenty of the aforesaid innovation is actually an amalgamation of existing products and services, leveraging each other’s parts to form a greater sum; yet we still seem to have so much trouble figuring out how to work together in embracing and taking advantage of our differences.

Cornell University, an Ivy League in the United States describes workplace diversity in a nutshell as — “Workplace diversity is a people issue, focused on the differences and similarities that people bring to an organisation”. Malcolm Forbes is also credited with describing diversity as “the art of thinking independently together”. So why is it when most people think of diversity, they think first of ethnicity and race, and then gender? Diversity is much broader. Diversity is otherness of those human qualities that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet present in other individuals and groups.

In the current understanding of workplace diversity, there are two dimensions that have been identified; the Primary Dimension which includes mainly the inborn; age, race, gender, physical ability etc. and the Secondary Dimension which includes education, religion and marital status.

If you are leading an organisation, it’s important to understand how these dimensions affect performance, motivation, success, and interactions with others.

Consider the Malaysian context of workforce diversity — unfortunately we still seem to be primarily caught up with a person’s race, gender and age!

At the risk of sounding like I am stating the obvious, we are very blessed to have diversity in the workplace as a norm rather than something that needs to be consciously worked on.

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and work through the differences, then you and your team will be better. The complementary effect of the diversity of talents should hold in fact serve to improve the decision making capabilities of the companies by providing different perspectives to the business’ most pressing needs. We know the drill. The world today is literally and metaphorically borderless so your market place is actually the whole world and not just your local village store. Everyone is connected that a product-related issue in Papua New Guinea is immediately a trending topic, even as far as Siena, Russia. Thus, any organisation which wants to survive today’s cut throat competition and emerge victorious will have to rely on innovative products/services and strategies to communicate with them. Not only this, it will have to be the first to the market in all these aspects.

To achieve all this, an organisation will have to rely on its talented workforce which can think out of the box and come out with something new each and every time it is expected to do so. One way to accomplish that is through a carefully handpicked and well nurtured diversified workforce. That explains why top organisations like Google, Microsoft, Accenture and Deloitte have got a separate section on their website, marketing the distinct edge which they have in the market.

Diversity at the workplace has gone from which have an imbalance of gender, race preceding years – especially in countries like Malaysia. Malaysian organisations.

An employer of choice, which in turn will draw is that good management alone will not necessarily help you work effectively with a diverse workforce.

Diversity at the workplace plays a key role in an organisation’s value proposition as an employer of choice, which in turn will attract better talent and subsequently aid in developing a wider pool of leaders in the Asian market.

Diversity is a natural setting of our national landscape, as opposed to the American reality of organisations. Diversity at the workplace has gone through a paradigm shift over the many preceding years – especially in countries which have an imbalance of gender, race and economical access. It has gone from being a legal compliance issue to fairness (the right thing to do) until finally arriving at its current makeup of the necessary and advantageous thing to do.

Many organisations want to be identified as an employer of choice as this normally attracts the best in the field. I feel that a conscious pursuit of a diverse workforce will aid greatly in making the proposition an attractive one.

Just a point of note though – diversity is different from affirmative action. I am not talking about putting in place a quota system in your organisation to forcefully create diversity for whatever reason. Diversity is about maximising the abilities of all employees to contribute to organisational goals. Affirmative action focuses instead on specific groups because of whatever historical and contextual situations such as race and gender. Affirmative action emphasises legal necessity and social responsibility, managing diversity emphasises business necessity. Ok, so let’s say you now have a diverse workforce in your organisation, made up of people of various races, cultures, ages, gender. What’s your role as a leader?

Some key leadership issues related to diversity that you would need to address include:

- What policies, practices, and ways of thinking within the organisational culture have differential impact on different groups?

- What organisational changes should be made to meet the needs of a diverse workforce as well as to maximise the potential of all workers, so that your company can be well positioned for the demands of the 21st century?

You would most probably have heard of the golden rule, “Treat others as you want to be treated.” The implicit assumption is that how you want to be treated is how others want to be treated. But when you look at this proverb through a diversity perspective, you begin to ask a few other questions: what is respect; is it the same for everyone? Does it mean saying “hello” in the morning, or leaving someone alone, or making eye contact when you speak? Take something routine like extending your hand to the business acquaintance. Shaking hands is an accepted and expected part of business etiquette. Or is it?

- It depends on the individual. We may share similar values, such as respect or need for recognition, but how we show those values through behaviour may be different for different groups or individuals. How do we know what different groups or individuals need?

- There is now the idea of the platinum rule which states: “Treat others as they want to be treated.” Moving our frame of reference from what may be our default view (“our way is the best way”) to a diversity-sensitive perspective (“let’s take the best of a variety of ways”) will help us to manage more effectively in a diverse work environment. Now, this of course takes plenty of time and efforts. It’s the leadership challenge of the 21st century.

- Are you going to lead the integration of these efforts into your organisation’s cultural fabric or leave it to be sorted out by the masses?

**Your role as a leader**

From a leadership perspective, there are some key roles leaders need to play in transforming the organisational culture to support a diverse work force. For example:

- An understanding and acceptance of the different concepts of diversity

- Recognition that diversity is threaded through every aspect of management

- Self-awareness, in terms of understanding your own culture, identity, biases, prejudices, and stereotypes

- Willingness to challenge and change institutional practices that present barriers to different groups

All this is actually a much bigger deal than most people would like to admit. Every individual responds in a myriad of ways to different stimuli. Every leader would kill to obtain the magic formula of managing diversities that exists.

Here’s the not so good news. The formula does not exist. Unfortunately, given the many dimensions of diversity, there is no easy recipe to follow. Advice and strategies given for one situation may not work for the same situation in another context.

And that seems to be the crux of the reason why some people seem to fear diversity. Authoritarian rule is still a much easier choice then having to deal with a difference in opinions within a group of people. If so much easier to come to a common conclusion when you are sitting with a group of people who have had the same sort of experiences as you and hold the same world view.

But the world isn’t functioning the same way. Sooner rather than later, if you wish to expand your market reach; you will have to start engaging with the outside world. And then diversity becomes a necessity. Not a choice.

Managing diversity means acknowledg- ing people’s differences and recognising these differences as valuable; it enhances good management practices by preventing discrimination and promoting inclusivity. So the conclusion you would have to draw is that good management alone will not necessarily help you work effectively with a diverse workforce.

My thoughts have been presented wearing a pretty rose-tinted view of the whole issue. But embracing diversity addresses a deep seated fear of the unknown for most people so it isn’t going to change overnight with a hug and a handshake. A more realistic starting point for all of us would be this very true reflection of the giant steps needed to enable utopia to come true. “If we cannot end all our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.” – John F. Kennedy

True leverage of diversity will take some hard work. Let’s at least make it safe to be different.

**View full article here**

Driving Performance Through Diversity

Leveraging on Malaysia’s Rich Mix of Gender, Age and Ethnicity

Malaysia is a country rich with diverse cultures. This has become a significant part of its unique identity and market differentiation. As the nation embarks on the journey towards a more competitive position and investment climate, the New Economic Model (NEM)’s focus on quality and innovation aims to transform Malaysia into a global powerhouse. Understanding the importance of attracting, retaining and developing its human capital for a sustainable future is one of the key imperatives behind the launch of the NEM framework, and serves as a complement to the recent TEP announcement. The objective is to ensure the necessity of better managing Malaysia’s diverse workforce, and the impetus of transforming, retaining, developing and advancing its human capital for a sustainable future is one of the key imperatives behind the launch of the NEM framework, and serves as a complement to the recent TEP announcement. 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RISE TO THE TOP

ICA EW AND TALEN T C ORP LAUNCH LEADERSH IP DEVELOPMENT PROGR AMME FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS

By LILY CHEAH
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On April 17, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales (ICAEW) and Talent Corporation Malaysia Berhad (TalentCorp) launched the Women in Leadership Malaysia (WIL MY) programme, an initiative aimed at grooming the leadership skills of top Malaysian female talent.

The eight-month programme will see participants paired with current successful corporate leaders, which include the likes of Selvarany Rasiah, chief regulatory officer of Bursa Malaysia and Nora Manaf, senior executive vice-president and group chief human capital officer at Malayan Banking Bhd.

Sixteen out of the panel of 17 mentors are successful female leaders, with Leaderonomics CEO Roshan Thiran being the sole male mentor, for this year at least. TalentCorp CEO Johan Mahmood Merican says he looks forward to more male mentors participating in the coming years.

Elements such as strength development workshops and peer learning groups are also being incorporated into the programme, with the view of helping participants gain greater self-awareness and confidence in their leadership to ultimately facilitate more females rising to top positions in corporate Malaysia.

WIL MY is part and parcel of the Government’s overall initiative to increase the participation of females in the workforce. It believes that this component in nation development is strategic to human capital development in females in the workforce. It believes that this overall initiative to increase the participation of females in the workforce. It believes that this overall initiative to increase the participation of females in the workforce.

In 2012, Malaysia’s female labour participation rate stood at 49.5%, lower than most countries in the ASEAN region. There was a significant improvement in 2013 with a 2.5% jump up to 52.4%.

The aim now is to see this figure increase to 55%, and this improvement will have a significant positive impact to Malaysia’s gross domestic product.

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ELIZABETH LEE
Senior executive director, Sunway Education Group & Sunway University

In your personal journey, what have been the main factors that have led you to your senior leadership position today?
I had a supportive mentor who dared to challenge me, who could see what I could become, who threw me into the deep and who allowed opportunity, but who always watched me from a distance and provided support and encouragement every time I needed it. This person helped to propel me to a senior leadership position at a very young age. Initiation by fire!

If you could tell your younger self three things about career and success, what would you say?
a) You must give your career your heart and soul. Love what you do, give it your full and undivided attention, make your career your hobby and you will never have to work another day!
b) Make allies across gender, generation and levels. Network with a genuine interest in your new found friends and develop meaningful relationships.
c) Never ever play politics or be drawn into any groups against any individual or other groups. Stay professional at all times.

RAJA TEH MAIMUNAH
Managing director and CEO, Hong Leong Islamic Bank Bhd

What are the main factors that hold women back from pursuing senior leadership positions?
A combination of things, but raising a family is often the main one. Many women make a conscious decision to step back when raising a young family, which is a selfish and noble thing to do.

What society needs to recognise is that effort is critical in building our nation. When mothers wish to return to the workforce, that option ought to be readily available to them, and this includes the provision of facilities to care for their children. That was perhaps the single most challenging thing for me when I was a young executive in a bank with young children to attend to.

In your personal journey, what have been the main factors that have led you to your senior leadership position today?
I am driven to where I am today primarily out of my desire to provide my children with the best I can give. They are my greatest inspiration. My mother, who has shown me that challenges must be seized and my mother who showed me that one’s love for the family goes beyond one’s own ambitions. She selflessly gave up her own dreams to raise her children.

3 Are there challenges that you face as a senior leader that you think are unique only to females?
I would say having to balance between home and work still poses a challenge to me.

The saying that a woman’s work is never done, is even more so for us. When I get home, it always is “mummy this and mummy that”. But I wouldn’t have it any other way. They are after all the reason I am here.

4 If you could tell your younger self three things about career and success, what would you say?
a) Be true to yourself and never compromise on your values.
b) Retain your femininity and harness your positive female traits e.g. be a more nurturing leader; inspire.
c) be bold and conquer the unknown! (Which my younger self did do)

AZLIN ARSHAD
Group CEO, ECM Libra Financial Group Bhd

1 What motivated you to get involved in the Voluntary Work Programme?
To share with others that will inevitably be ups and downs in their career, but that they can equip themselves with the necessary skills to ride the tough moments.

This programme is important as it provides the platform for people, not just women, to realise that leaders are not necessarily born, but can be nurtured and groomed, and that important element of confidence can be achieved.

As a mentor, I hope to be able to offer different perspectives on this.

2 Are women different to men in the context of work and careers?
There is this perception that professional women feel that they have to continuously justify where they are or want to be in, and then manage accordingly.

In your personal journey, what have been the main factors that have led you to your senior leadership position today?
I had good colleagues who helped me. I had clear ambition and drive and a certain level of disinterest in climbing up the corporate ladder or lack of commitment to their organisation.

This perpetuates the tendency of women towards self-doubt. They accept roles that others who are able to work long hours are underservicing or not taking seriously. They are then less interested in climbing up the corporate ladder or lack of commitment to their organisation.

2 What are the main challenges that you face as a senior leader that you think are unique only to females?
I also utilised my skills at work to share my experience and provide similar results to colleagues who work long hours.

3 Are women different to men in the context of work and careers?
Women have unique strengths which include a collaborative approach to problem-solving and synthesising a number of viewpoints effectively and quickly. Women are also usually emotionally attuned to people around them.

Women should capitalise on their unique strengths and should be flexible and adaptable to different situations. For example, if they should be prepared, if the situation warrants it, to confront and resolve difficult situations with the feelings of some of their colleagues or subordinates. What is required is a high level of selflessness and knowing which leadership style is the most appropriate under the circumstances.

4 In your personal journey, what have been the main factors that have led you to your senior leadership position today?
I had clear ambition and drive starting from the early stages of my career. I worked hard and made the necessary sacrifices in order to be where I am today. I felt fortunate to be in an environment that was merit-based and gave me opportunities to grow. I never felt discriminated against because I was a woman.

I had good colleagues who helped me and I had internal and external mentors. I attach significant importance to the people I work with and part of my success is due to them.

I also utilised my skills at work to organise my home to meet the needs of my family as I feel that being a mother requires the organisational skills as a manager at work. I have a good support system in terms of my extended family who I can rely upon whenever an emergency arose. I have a very supportive and understanding husband. When we are together as a family, I ensure that my attention is not diverted to my work or anything else as they are my priority. Lastly, I am blessed to have found such a fulfilling work in the capital market space. If you enjoy what you do, you are more likely to succeed.

1 What motivated you to get involved in the Voluntary Work Programme?
It’s always lonely at the top, especially for young leaders. In my much younger days, I longed for someone I could trust who had been the main factors that have led you to your senior leadership position today.

The moral support I received and continue to receive from my entire family (my husband, my parents, my children, my siblings). It would have been that much more difficult if they didn’t understand why, at certain points in my career, there was just no work-life balance. Learning from the people I worked with (my superiors, my peers and my subordinates); in pursuing any given task, always try to strive for excellence (vis-a-vis perfection).

Are there challenges that you face as a senior leader that you think are unique only to females?
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WHAT HOLDS WOMEN BACK?

“I BELIEVE IF WOMEN CAN MENTALLY PSYCHE THEMSELVES UP AND BELIEVE ‘NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE’, THEN THE WORLD IS FOR THEM TO CONQUER”

By LILY CHEAH
lily.cheah@leaderonomics.com

Pun, in your opinion, what are the four biggest things that hold women back from pursuing leadership positions?

1. Ferry ambition and self-motivation that, for many different reasons, have dwindled over the years.

In most cultures, men are expected to be the breadwinner in the family, so most women tend to take a back seat when it comes to pursuing their ambitions and dreams. The desire to be the leader of the pack and earn big bucks doesn’t excite them much, because for most married women, they see that as the role of their husbands.

2. Not having a sense of themselves as leaders reinforced by lack of supportive surroundings.

I sense that women need to gain a sense of who they are as leaders. Some women need to believe in their ability to move up. But it will be mind-boggling for women to do this alone. Their immediate family and in-laws need to visibly support them. There may be gender barriers at work as well, and companies need to support and recognise women as leaders to increase their chances to succeed. If more companies help affirm the ability of women as leaders and if we see and read about more successful women leaders, I believe more women will be more confident in their pursuit of leadership positions.

3. The added traditional gender roles and social pressure imposed by the complexity of priorities as a mother, daughter, wife, sister, or an in-law.

For most married women, family comes first. If there is a choice between spending more time at work or with their family, I sense that most women would naturally gravitate towards their families. This priority for family, which is indeed noble, has played a significant role in why some women may not pursue leadership roles.

4. Personal fears and insecurities.

I believe some women mentally beat themselves to a pulp before they start on anything. Made worse by past failures or negative experiences, many doubt their abilities to follow their dreams. Sometimes, more than anything else, their fears and insecurities are the things that hold them back. I believe if women can mentally psyche themselves up and believe “nothing is impossible”, then the world is for them to conquer.

For women who have taken a break from work and want to make a career comeback, what are four pieces of advice you would give to them?

1. Network, network, network to be seen and heard. Be bold and thick-skinned. Reach out and leverage on relationships and friends.

2. Tone up your corporate presence and offerings. Beef up your curriculum vitae and all related skills (interview, assessment, dress sense, etc).

3. Be mentally resilient, have the “Just Do It” and “Never Say Die” attitude. Stormy waves of challenges and failures will hit you hard, but if you keep your head up and fine tune your survival and coping skills, you will someday be all right.

4. Understand and internalise your personal values (what’s important for you, what you stand for, etc). Then develop a sense of purpose by pursuing career goals that align with your personal values.

The last thing you want is to get disillusioned about making the career come-back or get sorely disappointed with the outcome, or feel depressed with the choices you made. You need to know what you want and what’s important for you, and then pursue it religiously, despite challenges or failures along the way.

HOW TO REJUVENATE YOUR BRAIN!

By ZARA JAYNE
zara.jayne@leaderonomics.com

STUDIES have shown that exercise can create new brain cells and generate other changes. However, did you know that physical inactivity can also modify your brain? Scientists at Wayne State University School of Medicine, along with other academies, conducted a study with a dozen rats. Half of them were placed in cages with running wheels while the other half were in cages without them and remained sedentary.

After about three months, the rats were injected with a specific dye that marks the neurons in the rostral ventrolateral medulla, the part of the brain that controls the involuntary actions.

Although this experiment has been conducted on animals, studies have shown that people have the same brain region and they function similarly. The scientists found prominent differences between the two groups of rats when looking inside their brains after three months. The shapes of the neurons in the running rats were almost the same as when they started the experiment. However, the neurons in the brain of the sedentary rats grew more branches which were abnormally.

As a result, Reynolds explains that these altered neurons can possibly increase blood pressure and heart disease.

So, start working your brain and body the right way. Simple activities like walking, cycling or jogging will benefit you in the long run. Don’t be a couch potato!

Here are 5 interesting facts on physical activity according to the World Health Organisation:

1. Physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for worldwide mortality.

2. People between five and 17 years old should exercise for at least 60 minutes per day.

3. People who are 18-64 years of age should exercise at least 150 minutes per week, a minimum of 10 minutes for each session.

4. People aged 65 and above are advised to exercise at least 150 minutes per week. They should particularly work on balance and countering falls.

5. Good support system from family and friends motivates people to be more physically active.

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Now that you have a deeper understanding of physical activity and inactivity, take it seriously! Keep your brain healthy and alive!
RESPECT comes with recognition. It is an attitude in which we positively acknowledge the views of those whose interests or experience lead them to disagree with us on certain issues.

RECOGNISE
It is very important that all of us recognise the fact that each of us, no matter where we come from or what language we speak, is unique. Recognising the diversity among us helps us in understanding further about people who are different from us.

This is one of the lessons that I learned from the youth who attend our camps. When they start interacting with each other, they start to seek for the common things that they share and through this, they become closer with one another.

Diversity is a reality in the camps that we organise. Through the games and live simulations that we run, I discovered that when campers learn to accept each person in their respective teams as equals, they learn to value each member in their team and this leads to them learning on the diverse and unique abilities that each member has.

I believe that this is not only applicable in camps, it holds true to our society and organisations as well. If we learn to recognise and accept the diversity around us, we will be able to build a better community, a community that is knowledgeable, respectful and most importantly, loving.

Recognising diversity also makes us better thinkers. Diversity makes us revisit the questions that we thought we have found answers to.

For example, being in a multi-racial country makes me feel like I understand the cultures of my friends of different ethnicities.

However, through my meetings with some campers from different countries, I have learned that my knowledge of these cultures is as tiny as a mustard seed and there are a lot more insights to gain.

This and many other things that I have learned through the diversity in our leadership camps have opened my mind to see things at a whole new level.

RESPECT
Respecting diversity is about how we behave and our attitude towards diversity. Respect comes along with recognition. It is an attitude in which we positively acknowledge the views of those whose interests or experience lead them to disagree with us on certain issues.

When we recognise our diversity, we need to learn how to respect the fact that the identity of every individual carries his or her treasure. Every single trait portrays individuality and in order to understand another person or their point of view, we need to respect all parts that have their place in their life.

I have learned that to respect diversity, we must never assume or try to generalise a person without understanding him or her better.

When we start respecting, we will be able to recognise the values that people carry and appreciate them for who they truly are. Through this, we will not only be able to build connections and relationships, we also get to learn more from them regardless of whether we agree or disagree with their ideas. At times, it can challenge our existing values, and foundations.

Respecting diversity improves our ability to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. It makes us global thinkers.

CELEBRATE
We are repeatedly being reminded of the existence of diversity in the world we live in. Can you imagine what the world would be like if there was only one type of tree that existed? Or perhaps just one type of job available for all of us? Or how would we live in a world which only has one type of food (No! Unless it’s French fries)? or only one colour?

Roger Wilkins, civil rights leader and Pulitzer Prize winner, believes that we will have no hope of solving our problems without tackling the diversity, energy, and creativity of all our people. Therefore, celebrate the diversity that we have! We have learned through history that some of the worst moments in human history happened because people failed to appreciate and value the diversity that they have.

Failure to celebrate diversity gave birth to the Holocaust in Germany where Hitler eradicated nearly six million Jews or something closer to home, like the May 13, 1969 incident which took the lives of many Malaysians.

There are many ways or things that we can do to celebrate the diversity that we have. The easiest way would be through the different celebrations that we have in this country. For example, not too long ago, I attended an orang asli wedding celebration in Perak.

Through this, I learned more about the people, the culture and the problems that they are struggling with. I learned that some of them actually travelled all the way from Pahang to Perak on foot just to attend the wedding.

Not only that, I also got to taste their food. It is interesting to see that some of the orang asli have incorporated some parts of the traditional Malay wedding ceremony rituals like benganging into their custom.

When we learn more about certain cultures, we also get to learn about the problems and challenges that they face. According to Malcolm Forbes, diversity is the art of thinking independently together. When we learn to see from different perspectives, we can come together with different ideas to overcome problems and eventually create a better world for the future.

Let’s all start to recognise, respect and celebrate our diversity! Let’s genuinely reach out to others and learn more about each other. To love, after all, is to know. In order to bring transformation to the nation, we should start by loving our community.

Majura Perashot is a part of the youth division of Leaderonomics and she constantly seeks for exciting adventures to raise her adrenaline. When she is not looking out for new places to visit, she plays a role in organising camps for youth aged 12 to 19. If you are interested in exploring your leadership potential, visit www.leaderonomics.org/diodecamps or drop her an e-mail at majura.perashot@leaderonomics.com

DIODE YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP
Can’t be Iron Man or Wonder Woman for a living? Well, fret not because we have a solution on how you can be a super-leader without having a super power! Calling all 14 to 16 year olds to sign-up for the upcoming DIODE Youth Leadership Camp where we journey with you to unleash your talent and leadership potential. Find out your strengths and how you can be a world-class leader through fun-filled activities and challenges.

Don’t miss out this opportunity to reach your true potential by signing up for the camp at leaderonomics.com/diodecamps or e-mail us at diode@leaderonomics.com. Limited seats available!
DEAR CAREEROMERS,
I am an events executive. I’ve been here for two years and have designed and run a couple of really big events. I believe I am good at what I do. I am very creative, organised and structured and our clients love me. However, working with my boss is a big struggle. She hovers over everything I do. She demands for minutes of all meetings, wants copy of every email, and be part of every decision making process. After a long day at work, I have to inform her of every single detail of the projects I’m handling.
This is very frustrating for me because it takes up so much of my time. Being in the events line, you are always rushing for time, and dealing with my boss’ micromanagement takes up a lot and causes me late nights, and it’s taking a toll on my personal life.
Also, I do not feel empowered. My boss’ behaviour gives me the impression that she doesn’t trust me. Sometimes the manner in which she questions my thought processes and decisions affects my confidence at work.
I really love my job, but going to work is starting to get too frustrating. I know the right thing would be to talk to my boss, but I am not sure how I should go about doing it.
Can you please give me some advice on how I should address this?
Thanks,
SHAMIRA

DEAR SHAMIRA,
It is good to know you enjoy your work and that you are good at what you do. I also think you are right in wanting to talk to your boss about what you are experiencing in terms of the way she manages you. As you said, this is a delicate conversation, and you want to ensure that it is conducted professionally and you get the most out of it.
I believe your best option will be to have a performance conversation with your boss, which will help you answer three fundamental questions:

1 What does your boss expect of you?
Understanding what her expectations are will help you understand if there is alignment between what you are delivering and what your boss expects you to deliver. This is important as her behaviour/micro-management style may be derived from her belief that you are not doing as required/expected.

2 How are you doing?
Understanding your boss’ perception of how you are doing will enable you to identify if you are meeting her expectations, not meeting or exceeding her expectations. This again will provide you with information about alignment/misalignment of expectations. You can also seek specific examples that support your boss’ perceptions. You can also give her your own examples to support your current performance.

3 What can you do to further improve?
With this question, you will be able to understand ways to enhance your performance and continue growing as a professional. It is very important that you seek her views on how to go forward. You are not asking her for a solution. You are asking her for suggestions. You may have your own ideas/views.
This conversation is not about making your boss believe that she is right, or defending your performance. It is about enabling you to understand her perspective. You can, through this conversation, provide her with feedback as well. You can talk about things that you like and have learnt from her and things that may not encourage or support your best performance/efforts at work from the way she manages you.
This conversation may also help your boss because of the impact her behaviour and interaction with you is having on your performance. Remember, your boss may not necessarily be aware of how she is impacting you.
Give this conversation a chance. Go into it with an open mind and be willing to learn and understand. Don’t be defensive or accusatory. Commit to having respectful discussions with her. End the conversation with agreements on what will change and how you intend to move forward.
I wish you all the best.
CLAUDIA CADENA

DEAR SHAMIRA,
It’s good to note that you are enjoying your work and you have found a career you are passionate about. Here are some suggestions and that will hopefully help you embark on a better work relationship with your boss.

1 Update your boss in a structured manner
Managing bosses is an art form in the corporate world and it is no different from managing our teachers in school or parents at home. Most bosses like to be kept in the know. They don’t like surprises especially in events managed when you are spending a third party’s funds and when your profit is not known until the final payment is made.
Without knowing your age and total years of working experience beyond the two years of working experience in your current position, it is difficult to identify the root causes of your boss’ lack of confidence or in trusting you entirely with projects, despite the good work you have done. It is also plausible that since your boss has been managing you through this process for these two years, that there haven’t been any mistakes that affect the bottom-line or reputation of the company.
Usually bosses are only able to reduce overseeing all developments in detail when someone attains at least a supervisory or managerial level in his job and subsequently takes over the accountability for any loss or mistakes that occur during a project execution. Naturally your boss feels this strong need to be thoroughly involved perhaps because she is personally accountable.
Therefore, there is really no way around having to report to your boss until you achieve the level of seniority in a position where you will be shoulderling all responsibility for any possible issues.
You mentioned that you are organised, creative and structured. That being so, here are a few tips in which you can keep your boss updated and make life stress-free:
* Find the best time in the week for detailed project updates – would this be a Monday or a mid-week update? Plan your report well.
* Know your numbers, and your margins – update her in a way which makes her understand easily. Learn the style in which she asks questions and follow that model.
* Develop a few templates, and key-in data, as well as project updates as you sit in those client meetings. If they are well-written, you can then easily summarise for her all the high-level matters. For example: The budget and the margins.
Updating your boss in a structured and timely manner helps you to manage your reputation and also allows her to manage her own reputation with the client and higher-ups. This you must appreciate. It also helps to build trust on a daily level. Once trust is there, your boss will empower you. Remember, with bosses – part of our duty is to make them look good (with all other things being reasonable).

2 Find the time to have that heart-to-heart talk
I can only assume that you meet with her daily and have not had a long heart-to-heart talk for some time. Hence, there is perhaps a growing tension between the two of you. When is your next appraisal? And when is your next update with her? Find an opportune time – such as when the next client sends you a thank you letter congratulating you on great work done. That would be a good time. Choose a nice evening like a Friday evening and perhaps book your boss for a drink. Take your boss off-site and plan for that meeting.
Don’t let that meeting revolve around you and her but more on how the business has grown and how you feel that with a bit more autonomy, you can help her do more. Share with her some of your ideas and also find out how she would like to be updated.
Remember to offer some solutions – can you give her updates that are simple but tell the whole story? Barbara Miroto has a great model on the pyramid style of presentation. Use the ‘elevator pitch’ – updating your boss and keeping her in the know without too much detail.
Try this and over time you will find that trust will emerge and this could bring your relationship to a new level and allow empowerment to take place more readily. All the best.
NANCY S’ Y SIM-LIM

Also next week
What exactly makes a person credible?
How AmBank Group gives back to society
Roger Dawson on the art of negotiation
Speak up and make sure you are heard