MERDEKA, MERDEKA, MERDEKA

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDEPENDENCE
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Remembering home from abroad
THOUGH I wasn’t there at Stadium Merdeka 57 years ago, I know I would have stood proud to be Malaysian then as I do today. Thanks to my parents and to God, I have had the opportunity to study and work abroad. But without fail, like a homing pigeon, I have returned home.

Kepada warganegara Malaysia, selamat pulang ke tanahair

What does it mean to be Malaysian? In the first few decades of my life, there wasn’t a need to define it. We were all infused with that sense of belonging and identity, and when we wavered, a healthy dose of ‘Manglish’ always set us straight.

DEFINING MOMENTS

Every Merdeka, I am reminded of a wonderful wee woman. Years ago, in an affluent part of town, I was slashed by muggers and left for dead. Homeowners peered over their fences and locked gates.

The only people who dared approach me were their domestic workers, with helpful drinks of water and gobs of paper to mop up my blood. In my book, they were leaders. They had courage, compassion, and a sense of community.

Then she appeared. Adorning her apathetic neighbours, she bundled me into her car and sped to Pantai Hospital. “You pray to your God. I’ll pray to mine,” she hollered. A true Malaysian.

Our Datuk Nicol David and Datuk Lee Chong Wei. I can feel the hearts of every Malaysian collectively soar with every winning stroke, as well as their tears at the sight of our badminton heroes. Nearly every Malaysian has watched at least one of her productions — be it her longer films such as Sepet and Tonton, or the shorter commercials like Tan Hong Ming in Love.

Her honest depictions of true Malaysian life and culture are of much value to her countrymen, as she has proven countless times that art is an important outlet of expression, for both an individual as well as a country. “God gives everyone the same amount of talent. It’s just up to you to ‘korek’ (dig).” — Yasmin Ahmad

DATUK MOHKHTAR DAHARI, NATIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYER

Nicknamed SuperMoh, due to his football skills, he has helped the Selangor FA and Malaysian team win in many matches.

Although he never became famous on an international level, he has been and still is idolised by many as a fantastic football player.

Mohkhtar, along with many other Malaysian athletes, serves as reminder to us that in order to pursue our goals, we have to work hard. Or, in their case, train hard.

KARPAL SINGH, LAWYER AND POLITICIAN

Fondly remembered as the Tiger of Jelutong, Karpal Singh has stood up for justice in our nation through his career as a lawyer and politician.

He has respect from both sides of the political divide due to his charisma and desire for justice. Karpal has left a great legacy in this country – not only through the wrongs he has righted but also by inspiring the same vision for racial unity in the hearts of many Malaysians.

Looking at the above achievements and impact made, I am proud to be a Malaysian. Not because of the development of our country, but because of the many people that prove it to be an amazing place.

And just like how a home is not merely a place which gives us shelter but is made up of our family and friends, Malaysia is my home. It is filled with both my family and friends, as well as people like those mentioned above; those who feel responsible for making our home a better place.

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KAREN NEOH

Editor

leaderonomics.com

LEADERS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

There are countless Malaysian heroes. So much so we are featuring them in both this Merdeka issue, as well as our issue for Malaysia Day. We pay tribute also to the unsung heroes who take the path less travelled in serving the abandoned and forgotten of Malaysia.

On the career front, we focus on the important topic of engagement, and what role we play as employers or employees in nurturing this essential ingredient for peak performance as we approach 2020. We hope that as you enjoy quality time with family and friends this weekend, you spare a thought on how you can be a leader in your home, community, school and workplace to lead our country to greater heights. After all, decent-dick, lama-lama jadi bukti. Starting with me, and then another, let us work towards building communities of love.

Happy Independence Day from Leaderonomics!

KAREN NEOH

Editor

leaderonomics.com

THE Jatul Gemilang, which stands for “Stripes of Glory,” was designed by Mohamed Hamzah, a 29-year-old architect at that time. He was chosen as the winner through a public poll held by the Malay Mail. Young people represent!

Our beloved shopping mall, 1Utama, is the fourth largest shopping mall in the world.

Our first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, used his own money to build a halfway shelter for the escapes from the Railway of Death in Burma. To sustain the shelter, Tunku staged weekly plays on a Bangsawan stage to raise funds, along with his group of friends and assistants. They called themselves the “Young Men”.

The Tun honorary title is divided into two subcategories. The first category limits the number of holders to 25 people at one time, and the other to 35. Also, the wife of a Tun is referred to as Toh Puan.

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By HYMA PILLAY

HYMA PILLAY is a proud Malaysian who wishes all Malaysians Happy Independence Day. She hopes Malaysia continues to grow beautifully as we share love, kindness and joy with one another, regardless of social backgrounds, political beliefs and religion. To access more of her work, visit www.leaderonomics.com

LEADING LIKE TUNKU

THE late Tunku Abdul Rahman was a leader many Malaysians look up to, even till today. He is known to be a visionary, a fair and just leader.

Here are three lessons from our former Prime Minister which we can apply in our working world.

“Your must observe the law, respect and uphold the law, that is how it is supposed to be. To respect the rule of law, you don’t have to be a lawyer. We know the rule of the law is supposed to provide justice and so on.” – Tunku

While fighting for our country’s independence, Tunku always held the importance of law, and abided by it. We should do the same in our leadership positions. Although there may be many loopholes and shortcuts to get our organisation to where we want, there is always a more noble and humbling sense of achievement when we do things the right way, without violating our ethics.

“Just as the constitution ensures that his office is respected, so too must a Ruler respect the constitution.” – Tunku

What is a leader without the respect of his or her people? Great leaders like Tunku understand the importance of the people, and in return, accord them the respect they deserve.

As a leader, one should listen to the needs and voices of his or her people, and ensure that they have what they need to reach their utmost potential.

“TUNKU: WORDS TO LIVE BY”

1. “Anybody who has any love for this country and wishes to make it his home must give his complete and absolute loyalty.”

2. “Love for the nation should be the hallmark of the population to ensure that the country’s sovereignty and stature are preserved.”

3. “The Constitution provides the framework for a happy and content Federation. Let us make it work and build ourselves and our descendants a Shangri-La whereby we can all live in peace, happiness and prosperity.”

4. “Every one of us must respect each other’s rights and feelings, be tolerant of each other’s religions, customs and habits.”

5. “If you think you are rich, there are many who are richer than you. If you think you are clever, there are more people cleverer than you. But if you think you are honest, then you are among the few and in this instance, it is best to be among the few.”

6. “The Constitution is supreme and it must be upheld by all irrespective of class, creed or colour, it is also a permanent guarantee of stability and continuity in the life of this nation.”

7. “We must respect the wishes of the people. This is the very essence of democracy. Men in their official capacity with power vested in them should always be mindful of the feelings of others, particularly the small man.”

8. “We have worked together, and with the Rulers, have fought for and won independence for Malaya. Now we are able to walk with our heads up, and acclaim ourselves a free and independent people.”

9. “Life in this world is short. Let us make use of our lives in the pursuit of happiness and not trouble.”

ORN in Alor Setar, Kedah on Feb 8, 1903, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj was the seventh son of the Ruler of Kedah, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah. His mother was Che Manjalara.

Tunku received his early education in a Malay and English school in Alor Setar, followed by the Penang Free School and a Siamese school in Bangkok.

In 1920, a state scholarship took him to England for his tertiary education. He entered St Catherine’s College, Cambridge, and studied history and law. He graduated in 1925 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He then joined the Inner Temple, in London.

In 1931, he returned to Kedah and joined the Kedah state civil service. He served as district officer in Kuala Nerang, Langkawi, Sungai Patani and finally in Kulum.

In 1948, Tunku became chairman of the United Malays National Organisation (Umno) Kedah. He returned to the inner Temple, London to complete his law studies and was called to the English Bar.

Upon his return to Malaya in 1949, he was appointed deputy public prosecutor, and in 1951, succeeded Datuk Seri Onn Ja’afar as president of Umno.

On Jul 27, 1955, the Federation’s first elections to the Federal Legislative Council were held. In the new Government, Tunku became Chief Minister.

Dec 31, 1955 saw Tunku heading a delegation from the Alliance Party to London for talks with the British government on the future constitution of the Federation. This led to Malaya’s declaration of independence that took place on Aug 31, 1957 and Tunku became the first Prime Minister. It was during his administration that the Bangkok Declaration was signed to form the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or Asean.

A keen sportsman, Tunku had been a member of the Asian Football Confederation, and president of the Asian Badminton Union. He was the owner of a remarkable collection of Malay weapons, especially the keris.

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A statue of Bapa Kemerdekaan Tunku Abdul Rahman in front of Federal Hotel on Jalan Bukit Bintang.

Photo courtesy of Information Department Malaysia, taken from the book 50 Tahun Pendekatan Iec Puncak Emas.

Merdeka Merdeka! Merdeka! Stadium Bukit Bintang.

A statue of Bapa Kemerdekaan Tunku Abdul Rahman in front of Federal Hotel on Jalan Bukit Bintang.

Photo courtesy of Information Department Malaysia, taken from the book 50 Tahun Pendekatan Iec Puncak Emas.
STEP BACK, REFLECT AND STEP UP
TOWARDS A HIGH-INCOME NATION STATUS

By DINESH DORAI RAJ
dinesh.draj@leaderonomics.com

“D EVELOPMENT is about transforming the lives of people, not just transforming economies.” - Joseph E. Stiglitz, Making Globalization Work.

Looking ahead to Vision 2020, achieving the status of a high-income nation would elevate the position of our country.

In the process, we sometimes forget that economic development is not the only factor that will help us reach our vision. What is also important is the level of maturity to be achieved in economic development.

It is not just transforming the economy; it is also realizing that Malaysia has been hovering over the “middle income trap” for the past 19 years.

In reality, our country has been hovering over the issue of being stuck in the “middle income trap” for the past 19 years.

This terminology creeps in if a country has not graduated from the upper-middle income status after a threshold number of years (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development).

Based on the analysis of the Asian Development Bank, post-1950, the median number of years for economies to move from upper-middle to high-income, is 14 years.

In the process, we sometimes forget that Malaysia has been hovering over the “middle income trap” for the past 19 years.

The economic growth rate averaged 5.5% per annum from year 2009 where our GNI per capita was US$7,059 (RM22,860).

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In reality, our country has been hovering over the issue of being stuck in the “middle income trap” for the past 19 years.

In my humble opinion, in order to accomplish our country's bid to exceed US$15,000 by year 2020.

Time has now awakened the consciousness that we need to climb up the value chain and graduate from our bubble.

To enable Malaysia to reach its aspiration of a high-income nation by year 2020, our country has to develop a solution that incorporates innovation and strategy, with a focus on the management of high potential talent.

Measures have been taken by academia, industry as well as organisations like TalentCorp which has built effective partnerships already making a difference in addressing Malaysia’s talent needs.

STEPS TOWARDS A HIGH-INCOME NATION STATUS

THE NUMBERS:

Malaysia’s gross national income (GNI) per capita for 2013 was US$10,060 (RM32,860) when the threshold to achieve high-income status was US$12,745. This is a marked increase from year 2009 where our GNI per capita was US$7,059 (RM22,860).

After the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998, the economic growth rate averaged 5.5% per annum from year 2000–2008 (World Bank). However, in the Asian Development Outline 2014, GDP is forecast to grow by 5.1% in 2014 and by 5.0% in 2015 (Asian Development Bank).

The high-income threshold figure is expected to exceed US$15,000 by year 2020. From this, a question arises: Is Malaysia able to keep up the pace and achieve a high-income nation status by year 2020?

Being stuck in the current trap over an extended period of time has now awakened the consciousness that we need to climb up the value chain and graduate from our bubble.

In my humble opinion, in order to accomplish this, our country has to develop a solution that incorporates innovation and strategy, with a focus on the management of high potential talent.

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WANTED: RIGHT TALENT

We cannot deny the fact that having the right talent is currently the most powerful source of competitive advantage.

As mentioned in The War for Talent by Steven Hankin, the talent management phase needs a combination of criteria which includes a sharp strategic mind, leadership ability, emotional maturity, communication skills, ability to attract and inspire other talented people, entrepreneurial instincts, functional skills and, most importantly, ability to deliver results.

Defining the importance of talent management causes us to realise an underlying truth. As tough as it is to recruit the right talent, it can be tougher to get the best out of them.

Unlike the talent war in the 1990s–2000s, in which our country was driven by a lack of supply of all talents, we currently face challenges in a lack of supply of the right talent that can generate growth and compete in a fast-changing economic and technological landscape.

An unquestionable fact stresses that the formation of a successful economy needs the right talent along with great leadership.

In this, it’s not about one “superhero” leader who wins the battle, but rather an entire team composed of people who have leadership skills, which collectively demonstrates insight, courage and innovation to deliver the targeted growth.

ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT

This allows the visualisation of the gap between where an organisation is now and where it needs to be.

This will involve reviewing trends, facts and figures, completing the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, and prioritising the vision and mission followed by the implementation of an effective roadmap to develop effective talent management strategies which can collectively contribute to Malaysia’s economic transformation.

WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

The three core phases involved are:

- **Supply analysis** – Involves identifying the job roles needed in the specific department or company.

- **Gap analysis** – Recognises gaps that need to be filled in the assessed department or company.

- **Demand analysis** – Assesses what is needed for the success of the identified job roles.

TALENT REVIEW

Identification of high potential talent is achieved with the acknowledgement of their strengths, leading to better formulated succession plans, recognition of the organisation’s “talent pool”, as well as accelerated growth through the internal knowledge transfer.

Beyond viewing this as a talent development plan, it is also an investment decision that will grow people who will continue developing the organisations they are in to ensure growth of the nation’s economy.

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Implementation of talent development programmes with formal and informal opportunities is vital and should be scaled up so that employees not only learn but also contribute to the learning of others.

After all, everyone has his or her strengths, and such collaboration can lead to greater success that can be visible in the country’s economy as well.

Demand analysis – Assesses what is needed for the success of the identified job roles.

Gap analysis – Recognises gaps that need to be filled in the assessed department or company.

Talent review – Identification of high potential talent.

Supply analysis – Involves identifying the job roles needed in the specific department or company.

To enable Malaysia to reach its aspiration of a high-income nation by 2020, our country has to develop a solution that incorporates innovation and strategy, with a focus on talent management.

I believe that we all have a role to play, and that the measures above may be the building blocks that can prove to be a catalyst for the growth of our people, our organisations and at the aggregate level, our country.

Dinesh Dorai Raj is a Learning and Development Specialist with the Corporate Services team of Leaderonomics. He has a strong desire to lead as an example based on his true life story that combines pain, perseverance and optimism. He believes anything and everything in this world can be a success story.

You can email him at dinesh.draj@leaderonomics.com
LEAVING A MARK

TRIBUTE TO NAMELESS LEADERS

By VINESH NAIDU
vin@leaderonomics.com

AS WE CELEBRATE ANOTHER MILESTONE OF OUR EXISTENCE AS A NATION, LET US ALSO PAY TRIBUTE TO THE NAMELESS MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE LEFT A LASTING IMPACT ON SOCIETY.

We arrive today at a juncture of our young nation’s history at what can generously be described as blessed growth. We have enjoyed relative social stability. We enjoy a good rate of economic growth. We have impressive skyscrapers. We are one of the largest producers of palm oil and rubber in the world. Our products are recognised as world-class, especially in agriculture.

After having written the statements above with a flourish, I sat back to bask in the shared glory of our nation and proceeded to go grab a drink. Then I read them again and it hit me. Everything in that paragraph is exactly what the country seems to have cherished and glorified. Material success and an adoration of wealth above humanity. What about the people that make up this nation?

A nation can only truly consider itself advanced and successful if every strata of society has access to the same level of comfort and well-being. We are a blessed nation that has many things going for us. But like all nations, there are areas in which we need to plug some holes. Take leadership, for example. Like most definitions of leadership, we seek to “lionise” those who are able to command from the top: those who project strength of charisma, those who impress us with their outsized personalities. LEADERS WITH HEART

But there is another side to leadership that hardly gets recognition, yet has played a crucial role in getting us to where we are. It is the leadership of compassion, empathy and perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds. The Malaysia we read about every day is the one built on the headlines of a tiger economy. In this realm reside the captains of industry who make mega million dollar decisions every day to ensure the country’s economy is kept ticking.

There is plenty of literature out there about this group of leaders, so I’d like to invite you to consider another set of leaders. They don’t always get the credit they deserve yet have played just as crucial a role to ensure the country has kept its social fabric in place. Malaysia has individuals who have chosen to pursue intrinsic contentment that’s based on service to people who need it in the most obvious way — the Maslow theorem so to speak — of providing shelter and food for the last and the least of society. They are the homeless, the abandoned and the forgotten. I am talking about individuals — who I consider to be leaders — who have chosen to put compassion and heart before profit and material comfort.

Malaysia as we know it, is a fast developing country of high rise buildings and concrete monoliths.

What we don’t always see in the public eye are those who have been left out of the system due to a lack of parentage, those who have been abandoned in their old age as well as members of society who have also been abandoned and are in need of care.

Step forth the Malaysian leaders who have decided that this is their life’s calling, i.e. their path to making a difference. For a developing nation, there isn’t always excess wealth that can be spread to those who chose to build a safety net for others who have fallen off the grid.

This then makes the contribution of these individuals even more amazing and deserving of their place when the story of our nation is written. What happens when we do not have enough of a support system for the last and the least? They are robbed of an opportunity for growth and development. A stable family setting is crucial for a child’s development, or so goes the common understanding. At the risk of making a blanket statement, the higher risk of emotional and psychological intervention needed becomes a follow-up social issue to be dealt with.

Not having a proper social support system puts us on a one-way street into the depths of an abyss that will take a monumental effort to get out of. So, what makes these leaders, leaders? Just as how we hear many successful entrepreneurs talk about leading with their heart and taking ownership of an issue that speaks to their intrinsic motivation, I would consider these individuals as examples to be held in the highest esteem.

ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

These leaders chose the path less travelled. They went in knowing that Malaysia doesn’t have the best track record in terms of social welfare protection. These leaders decided to do something about a segment of society that needed help the most. What could have seen them through? If we consider captains of industries as “leaders” for leading people to economic success, then we should also consider the men and women who lead people to social safety and eventual social success as leaders as well.

These leaders approached the task at hand with a strong sense of conviction and the perseverance to deal with all the bureaucratic hardship that these initiatives entail.

We haven’t even begun to consider the potential for heartbreak if things don’t work out for the intended recipients. These nameless leaders have put in place and are continuing to put in place important social institutions that play a part in making this nation a great nation.

You have to have courage to undertake a mission as big as this, taking in people from different walks of life whom you have no way of knowing the history of how they came to be.

You have had to work hard to keep it going. Just the same way as corporate leaders need to figure out how to pay salaries at the end of the month, the leaders who lead shelters need to ensure that the next meal is available for the residents who have come seeking comfort and solace.

People do not choose to be homeless, or abandoned, just as people do not choose to be less experienced or strategic than their peers in companies, therefore needing corporate leadership.

A NOTE OF THANKS

So thank you dear nameless, faceless, but fearless leaders who have chosen to walk the path less travelled.

Thank you for choosing to be leaders, putting empathy first and foremost as your life’s mission, and thereby providing a safety net for the homeless, the abandoned and the forgotten of Malaysia. As we celebrate another milestone of our existence as a nation, let us also pay tribute to the nameless men and women who have left a lasting impact on society.

Those who chose to dedicate their lives to being providers of comfort and shelter for those who needed it. Those who provided the much needed stitching to ensure the loose cotton doesn’t pull apart the entire fabric of the nation.

Happy Independence Day Malaysia, this year we celebrate independence not only from the shackles of colonial rule, but also independence from ignorance, strife and apathy.

Vinesh Naidu is talent programme manager at Leaderonomics, helping to develop and accelerate talent in corporate organisations. For more insightful writings by Vinesh, visit www.leaderonomics.com
TRENDS IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

HOW ARE ORGANISATIONS ENGAGING EMPLOYEES?

WHAT IS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

Aon Hewitt defines employee engagement as the extent to which an organisation’s culture is a positive one for its employees. Engagement is measured on two levels:

1. The extent to which an employee is willing to put their best effort into work:

   a. They tend to display three key behaviours at work:
      1. Pay: The extent to which an employee is satisfied with their pay.
      2. Stay and stay: The degree of voluntary employee turnover.
      3. Drive: The extent to which an employee is willing to go the extra mile and make additional contributions.

2. The extent to which an employee is willing to say positive things about the organisation:

   a. They are doing their part in driving the organisation to success.
   b. They are willing to share feedback with their leaders.
   c. They are willing to participate in their organisation’s decision-making processes.

WHAT DRIVES EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

While organisations work towards creating a “win-win” environment that is beneficial for both employees and the organisation, it is important to understand what drives employee engagement.

1. CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

   a. Career development and advancement opportunities is one of the top drivers of employee engagement.
   b. Employees are looking for more clarity in terms of career growth and are expecting managers to support them.

2. RECOGNITION

   a. Recognition (41%) has also remained consistent, yet each group displays additional drivers and their order of drivers varies.

3. PAY

   a. Pay (50% satisfaction score) is the highest driver of employee engagement.

4. SELECTION LEADERSHIP

   a. Selection of the right leaders and managers is critical in creating an engaged workforce.

5. MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

   a. Effective management delivery is essential to achieving employee engagement.

6. BENEFITS

   a. Benefits are a key driver of employee engagement.

In Malaysia, the engagement levels have increased to 61% in 2013, up from 51% in 2012. However, the trend in engagement levels doesn’t seem to reflect the extent of efforts being made.

The Best Employers 2.0 – Malaysia 2015 study also finds that Best Employers in Malaysia are more engaged employees than other employers in the country.

FOR EMPLOYERS: HIGH IMPACT INITIATIVES TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES

1. DEFINE AND DELIVER A UNIQUE AND COMPELLING EMPLOYEE PROPENSITY (EVP)

   a. Best employers ensure that a strong EVP is clearly communicated and authentically marketed, so that employees understand it and can articulate it to others.

   b. Understand the key components of the EVP, and actually make them happen. Organisations must actively support and encourage employees and leaders to embrace the EVP and share their personal experiences of it with others.

2. DEVELOP EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

   a. Designing the right “people processes” is key to driving a strong focus on performance management and creating a performance-driven culture.

   b. A clearly articulated and fair performance management process (55%) is important to maintain employee engagement.

3. TAILOR TALENT MANAGEMENT TO ENGAGE SPECIFIC EMPLOYEE GROUPS

   a. Factors beyond economics and geographic conditions can influence employee engagement. As such, understanding the different values and expectations of different employee groups plays an important role in ensuring active engagement.

4. UNDERSTAND YOUR EMPLOYEES

   a. While organisations work towards creating an engaging environment for all employees, it is important to understand what drives employee engagement.

   b. Understanding the company’s key drivers of engagement is a non-negotiable step towards becoming an engaged organisation.

For employees, tapping on the most trusted team members in your current role or seeing how you can contribute to the（company’s brand）will help you understand what drives your personal engagement.

For employers, developing an honest and effective performance management approach is critical to maintaining employee engagement.

As you gain a better understanding of what drives employee engagement, you can start implementing initiatives that engage employees and drive the organisation towards success.

In conclusion, organisations that are committed to employee engagement will see an increase in productivity, morale, and overall satisfaction among their employees.
THE NEED TO ENGAGE

FIVE PAIN POINTS

By JOSEPH TAN
joseph.tan@leaderonomics.com

MENTION “engagement” and the next associated word is “survey” – at least within the corporate context. Yet, it is one of those management buzzwords which appear to be the panacea for all things bad and ugly in the workforce. Furthermore, “engagement” has an air of respectability when mentioned, and only when we realise how common the pain of disengagement is can we start to appreciate the need to proactively plan for engagement excellence. The right way to plan for engagement is to first identify the pain points for disengagement. Let’s face it, unless the pain is strong enough, the plan will not be sustainable. The pain determines the gain.

1. HIGH TURNOVER
   The No. 1 responsibility of organisation leaders is performance. While it is imperative that every employee pulls his or her own weight to cross the finish line of high performance, we need to ask this all-important “sustainability” question – “Are they in good shape once they cross the finish line?”

2. HIGH BLAME CULTURE
   Culture produces results. While productivity issues can be attributed to technical problems, a significant portion of the drag on performance is linked to a disengaged work culture. In fact, Gallup estimates that for the United States, active disengagement costs US$450bln to US$550bln per year (State of the Global Workforce Report 2013). Soon enough, the disengaged employee was a culture has employees who take personal ownership and accountability to fix problems instead of finger-pointing. It is interesting that as an organisation grows, the tendency to play the blame game increases. This is because employees become territorial in the mindset and in the pursuit of safeguarding “silo goals”, thus losing sight of the wider key results for the organisation. More processes and policies will not resolve the blame culture. In actuality, it might even heighten it! What is required is a workforce which is actively engaged to take ownership and who will ask, “What else can I do?” rather than “Who can I blame?”

3. POOR MORALE
   It used to be that what it takes to be a manager is the ability to issue clear commands. In today’s context, when employees show up for work, they are also looking for clear connections. Put simply, the managers of today need to know how to capture the hearts and minds of employees – especially the younger generation. The command and control approach works for a generation that focuses on survival priorities – the need to put bread and butter on the table. However, for today’s generation, “bread and butter” matters are a given and they now have higher actualisation goals that determine the state of their motivation at work.

   Employees of today desire to know that their opinions count, that their contributions are appreciated, and that their personal development is taken into consideration. In this context, leaders need the foresight to view engagement as a human capital investment strategy, rather than just a ranking in survey results.

4. POOR ALIGNMENT
   In general, employees want to do a good job. However, managers do not take the time and effort to communicate expectations clearly. Much of the communication of expectations which happens is nothing more than just playing the numbers game – “These are your numbers – you better achieve them or else…” The clearest indicator of mis-alignment – according to Gallup’s Engagement criteria – is that employees are not provided the right resources and materials to do a good job.

   In other words, you are sowing the seeds of a disengaged culture if you regularly tell your employees what to achieve, yet do not support your instructions with the resources that is needed.

   To put it bluntly, it doesn’t take a lot of leadership competency to play the numbers game. But, it does require an engaged leader to pay attention to equipping his or her team members with the arsenal needed to fulfil the given expectations.

5. POOR COACHING SKILLS
   According to Gallup, a great manager has four vital roles: 1. Identify and nurture talent 2. Set clear expectations 3. Motivate and engage employees 4. Develop employees

   The sad reality today is this: Much of what are the vital responsibilities of the manager has been outsourced and relegated to the human resources department!

   If an organisation is serious about sustainable performance, then the leadership cannot run away from the need of developing good managers into great managers by honing their coaching skills. Employees are tired of being told what to do. In fact, most of them already know what they should do. Rather, they are looking for someone who can identify their potential and develop their talents into productive application.

   From a survey of more than 10 million employees, Gallup concludes that employees who have the opportunity to do what they do best every day are six times more productive at work. This cannot happen without instilling a culture of engaged coaching amongst the managers.

   So, there you have it, the five basic pain points of disengagement. The next time you consider an employee engagement survey, start by looking deep into the culture of the organisation first.

   A survey done without cultural consideration will only lead to deeper scepticism – and that will destroy the aim of achieving sustainable high performance.

   Joseph Tan is the CEO of Leaderonomics Center of Engagement Excellence and is passionate about ensuring all Malaysian employees are fully engaged in their work and with their organisation. If you would like to enhance the engagement levels at your organisation, email people@leaderonomics.com for more details.
By FREDA LIU
editor@leaderonomics.com

I was born in the small town of Seria in Brunei. It was my only idea of home, and I had an amazing childhood with the perks of a great school, plenty of places to run around and quality time with my family. Despite Brunei being my country of birth, I cannot be a citizen. Fortunately my parents were Sarawakians. Upon my father’s retirement, we decided to settle back in his hometown of Kuching. So there I was at 14, a Malaysian citizen but feeling like a fish out of water.

FEELING MALAYSIAN

When did I feel Malaysian? It may be my birthright but I was never indoctrinated in the local school system. In fact, I knew the Brunei national anthem better than Malaysia’s. For those old enough to remember, I was watching television one day and I heard a beautiful voice crooning these lyrics.

And just like a mother with a rebellious teenager, you don’t disdain the child. You see things through. You resolve things. You don’t abandon the child at the sign of trouble. That’s just my humble opinion.

One person who has inspired me and truly epitomised the true Malaysian spirit would be none other than Datuk Mohamad Nor Khalid, more affectionately known as Lat. Growing up reading Lat’s cartoons, he was able to transcend all races and religions when depicting how we live. We were able to recognise ourselves in his cartoons.

It was that fine line where we could laugh at ourselves and not feel insulted in the process. My other icon would have to be Datuk Nicol David, our squash queen. She’s a role model for the young and old. She always wears a smile on her face. Be it a win or the occasional loss, she’s always gracious. She always accepts responsibility, talks about her future steps and continues to astound us.

My only axe to grind is that squash is not an Olympic sport. She will be Malaysia’s first Olympic gold medallist, for sure!

CLOSED TO HOME

Of course, this was Francesca Peters singing, the song moved me to tears. And you know what, I believed it.

WHO IS MALAYSIAN?

Lately, the whole issue of loyalty has been questioned. Personally, I like to think that the country is going through its teenage phase with its angst and troublesome behaviour.

...and track record, he revolutionised the point of sales (POS) industry by changing how we shop and how products were categorised.

Speaking of disruptors, my boss at BFM Media, Malek Ali, is another one of my heroes. He faced a lot of resistance in the beginning because he disrupted the industry and how “things are always done”. However, through perseverance, he pushed on and managed to become a successful person.

BFM’s purpose is basically to build a better Malaysia by championing rational, evidence-based discourse as a key element of good policy decisions.

BFM applies its discourse-based approach to other programming areas such as entrepreneurship, health, fashion, arts, sports and music, as well as its executive education initiative, The BFM Business School. When I joined the company close to six years ago, that was the vision I was sold on. And despite criticisms and setbacks, that still continues to be our war cry. It goes to show that we can make changes wherever we’re placed.

MY MALAYSIA

“Malaysia Where Love Grows” is the theme for our 57th Merdeka Day this year. I would like to think of my love for the country as a sacred marriage vow. Many times this marriage has been tested; from the 2008 and 2013 elections to the recent crisis with MH17 and MH370. We’ve seen how Malaysians have behaved during those trying times.

I choose to see the good and the renewed hope these events have brought, and not dwell on the negative. With this, I can only renew my “marriage” vows.

I, Freda Liu, take you, Malaysia, to be my constant friend, my faithful partner and my love from this day forward. In the presence of God, our family and friends, I offer you my solemn vow to be your faithful partner in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, and in joy as well as in sorrow. I promise tolove you unconditionally, to support you in your goals, to honour and respect you, to laugh with you and cry with you, and to cherish you for as long as we both shall live.

Freda Liu is a producer and presenter with an independent business radio station in Malaysia. She is also a certified trainer and coach. You can find her on Twitter @voiceguru. To send her feedback or to read more articles by Freda, visit www.leaderonomics.com
**MALAYSIA’S PRIDE**

**LEADING LADIES AND THEIR THOUGHTS**

**BY PREMA JAYABALAN**

prema.jayabalant_leaderonomics.com

Malyasia, she was also director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) in Vienna, in 1999 for a total of two years and eight months before returning home to set up the space agency. Nevertheless, consensus building enables us to talk, leave behind differences and agree on a direction. Standing behind this final decision allows us to achieve a lot of things.

What does independence mean to you?

Independence also means being respected for my views and aspirations in life. Independence also means being respected for my views and aspirations in life. What are the challenges you faced when taking on a secondment in PwC UK and how did you overcome them?

Firstly, leaving a comfortable lifestyle that I had grown accustomed to in Malaysia. It took some courage to make that call. Being an introvert, settling into a large office was also rather daunting. It helped that there were many international secondees in the London office. I also spent a lot of my time working with a large oil and gas client. I was privileged to work alongside a very capable and high energy team on the client engagement. It is important to be financially independent too, so that I can provide for my family and to take on activities that I enjoy such as spending time on the ski slopes or on the beach with my family. Independence also means being respected for my views and aspirations in life. Independence also means being respected for my views and aspirations in life. What does independence mean to you?

Independence means being able to pursue what I want in life. Independence also means being respected for my views and aspirations in life. Independence also means being respected for my views and aspirations in life.

**PAULINE HO**

**DATUK DR REBECCA FATIMA STA MARIA**

Born and bred in the Portuguese Settlement in Malacca, Datuk Dr Rebecca Fatima Sta Maria is secretary-general of the International Trade and Industry Ministry (MITI). Her roots are deeply entrenched in this country and through mixed marriages, her family is a reflection of Malaysia.

What does independence mean to you?

Independence is a blessing, and a gift. The freedom borne of independence should not be taken for granted. And given the challenges that Malaysia is going through, Merdeka Day takes on a special significance for me. It reminds me that our founding fathers worked so hard for us to have the rights and freedoms to live in peace, to practise our faith and to enrich each other through our diversity.

What is the most valuable advice you have received thus far and who was it from?

“To thine own self be true”. This advice is from Polonius to his son, Laertes. I first encountered this when I read Hamlet for my A Levels. Regardless that this piece of advice came from a person less than authentic himself, for me this quote reflects the importance of being true to oneself, the value of honesty and integrity. Independence also means being respected for my views and aspirations in life.

**DATUK DR MAZLAN OTHMAN**

Born in Seremban, Datuk Dr Mazlan Othman is the country’s first astrophysicist. At the height of her career in Malaysia, she was the founding director-general of the National Space Agency. She was also director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) in Vienna, in 1999 for a total of two years and eight months, before returning home to set up the space agency. She was then re-appointed by the UN to lead UNOOSA in December 2007 until December 2013.

What does independence mean to you?

To me, independence is the freedom to think, associate and to move. If you have the opportunity to associate with anyone and move wherever you like, that to me is independence. We are lucky we have all of these opportunities in our country.

What is the most important lesson you learnt throughout your experience at the UN?

The most important lesson I learnt throughout my tenure at the UN is that, a lot can be achieved through continuous, sincere and open engagement. From there, you build solid consensus. There can never be a situation where everyone agrees on the same thing. Nevertheless, consensus building enables us to talk, leave behind differences and agree on a direction. Standing behind this final decision allows us to achieve a lot of things.

What is your recipe for managing your career and family?

I enjoy my work. Therefore, I find the energy to perform well at work, delivering quality service to our clients with the support of my team. I also maintain open lines of communication with my husband and children. My husband is supportive of my career and my children understand what my role demands. They see it as a part of who I am. They know that I make it a priority to participate in our family events, spend time with them and be there whenever they need me.

Eight-year-olds are very smart nowadays and they are my toughest clients. I always need to work hard to exceed their expectations! And this motivates me to be a better mom.

What is your advice for young people who want to pursue a career in astrophysics?

My advice to the young people is to do what you are really passionate about. Do not give up easily, especially when you find challenges coming along your way. There is a cycle in every career. There are the glory periods filled with accomplishments. Then, there is a time when the field you are in is down. However, you as an individual can always be up if you excel in your field, which can only be achieved if you are passionate about your work.

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Multiculturalism, which is an inseparable part of us, makes us unique among other nations. Aside from enjoying different food, learning and respecting different cultures and traditions, we are also fluent in speaking other languages. Believe me, the ability to speak multiple languages never fail to impress my foreigner friends.

Our multilingual conversations and our unique Malaysian vocabulary, including the "laht." In Malaysia, we seem to develop the tendency to call every elderly "auntie" and "uncle". We also call everyone else "boss" or "bro". Apart from that, I guess what I miss most is the sense of belonging. You can take me away from Malaysia, but you can never take the "Malaysian" away from me.

Our food of course! That's what we miss most when we are away from home. Malaysian cuisine is now the new storm in Sydney. Almost everyone is raving about Malaysian cuisine. A foreigner friend once told me he had tried all Asian cuisines, but he never went back to the other. You might think that's a bad thing, but looking at Malaysian restaurants mushrooming everywhere in Sydney, I guess he was telling the truth.

I'm with a church voluntary group and we go to the streets to help the less fortunate. Sometimes it's just spending time talking with them. At other times, we get our hands dirty by some serious house cleaning. I got a culture shock on my first visit because the less fortunate are not the poor (monetarily), but those who lost hope in life, are on drugs or live on welfare, i.e. the forgotten society. They are despised by most of the locals, and foreigners like us are helping them.

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There are many countries around the world that adapt to a multicultural society. But only Malaysians live in each other's culture. That's what makes me a Malaysian. Lots of little things make me miss home. Doing things impromptu, turning up at a friend's house unannounced, less rigid activities. Monotony makes me miss home.

I would never want to take anything out of Malaysia. We are the ambassad- ors of the unique culture we own. I'm proud to say "this is how we do it back home". Nevertheless, it has become a habit to always introduce our famous delicacies wherever we are.

I voted to raise funds for Action Medical Research, an organisation dedicated to funding research to help reduce the high rate of premature birth and improve treatment for sick babies. As part of the challenge, I trekked the Namibian desert, shaved my head and raised in excess of £9,000 (RM44,000). In conjunction with the 2012 London Olympics, I was one of the quantity surveyors in the project to build Europe's biggest shopping centre, Westfield Stratford City. It was a remarkable journey and moment to witness the completion of the centre prior to the Games.

In conjunction with National Day this weekend, we decided to speak to Malaysians living abroad to find out what being a Malaysian means to them. It's very encouraging to know that despite being so far away, Malaysia is and always will be a place they call home.

To me, being Malaysian is about the sense of normality. We derive from the diversity surrounding us. The various cultures and food that we share exemplify how our lives have been built around such differences, yet it's those differences that bring us together. The challenge, however, is for these accepted and embraced differences to not be exploited and be divisive...

The Malaysia I grew up in that no longer exists. I have a friend, now living in Canada, who also is a transplant from Malaysia. For us, we share a common recollection of a time/place/people that will only remain in our memories. Of course there's the food...

That celebration of our differences! I live in a country that embraces, with equal fervor, individualism and wholesale-homogeneity. It is a curious contradiction that is not widely acknowledged.

The various cultures and food that we share exemplify how our lives have been built around such differences, yet it's those differences that bring us together. The challenge, however, is for these accepted and embraced differences to not be exploited and be divisive...

The food fusion! Where else in the world can you find noodles in curry?
How old were you on Aug 31, 1957?
17 years old

What was the atmosphere in the stadium like?
I was a member of the British Red Cross so I didn’t really notice the atmosphere because I was too busy carrying out my duties. I was administering first aid and focused on what I needed to do. We slept there overnight. I was aware of what independence meant but I did not think much of the significance then.

What does Merdeka mean to you, having experienced pre-independence?
Malaysia has progressed tremendously and become a very strong country economically since independence. In spite of being a multiracial country, Malaysians live harmoniously and with mutual respect for each other.

PUSHPAVALLY SAMINATHAN
How old were you on Aug 31, 1957?
10 years old

What was the atmosphere in the stadium like?
I still remember being a 10-year-old child travelling on my father’s scooter accompanying him to the Royal Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur on the night of Aug 30, 1957. I was astonished to see a huge crowd gathered there to witness the handover of power from the British to our first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman.

On the stroke of midnight, the Union flag was lowered. The new flag of Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. "Look at our very own new flag.”

I was extremely proud to be one of them.

What does "Merdeka" mean to you, having experienced pre-independence?
I would like to share my views of life before and after independence. Life was indeed not a bed of roses before independence. There was no much progress in the country. Life was tough and traumatic during the Japanese occupation, whereby there was not much space for peace and harmony. The freedom to move about was extremely limited and we were often at home because of the chaotic surroundings.

There was always a curfew that prevented people from leaving home. There was also a shortage of food and people actually planted vegetables, tapioca and sweet potatoes and lived on them. We too went through this ordeal for a while. All this changed when we got independence. Life certainly got much better.

My advice to the youth is to appreciate the advancements in our country which many have worked very hard for and to play a part towards achieving greater development and harmony for our beautiful multi-racial country.

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