CRISIS LEADERSHIP
WEATHERING THE STORMS
PAGES 6–7
THE HEAT IS ON

WHILE the word “crisis” is quite clearly defined, I believe that our personal thresholds and continuum of “fair weather” – "Uh-oh", “We have a serious problem here" and “CATACLYSM” might differ. And as a result, our coping strategies would likewise vary.

On the flip side, a crisis can also be a defining moment, a chance to reassess where we are, and to recalibrate.

Shahran Masood does make the point that in fast-changing and unpredictable situations, leaders need to adapt rapidly, with readiness and clarity of thought on the battlefield.

And before any action is even taken, John Baybay underlines the need for leaders to recognise when a threat escalates into an actual crisis.

The black comedy M*A*S*H (how many actually know this reference?) was a satire on war, depicting how doctors were bombarded with one calamity after another (and quite literally) and how different characters dealt with it.

Dr Yvonne Sum, our new contributor – though certainly not new to the topic of leadership in times of crisis – shared her experience supporting a senior leadership team survive and thrive after a prolonged failure to perform.

The personal journey of rising up to face head-on a life-altering accident, is seen through the eyes of a new friend he had to write about it.

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CHANGE CAN BE A GOOD THING

By SARAH TAN
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With the rest of the pullout addressing good leadership qualities for companies to possess in times of crisis, here are a couple of case studies in which they were practically applied; companies that showed proper efficiency, responsibility, and public relations.

BELOW ARE A COUPLE OF EXAMPLES OF SOME COMPANIES’ REACTIONS IN CRISIS SITUATIONS.

JOHNSON & JOHNSON

After the mysterious deaths of seven people in 1982, two off-duty firemen came to realise the cause of them, after making connections over casual conversation over the radio. Johnson & Johnson’s Extra-Strength Tylenol.

After further investigation, it was found that the Tylenol capsules have been laced with 65 mg of cyanide – more than enough to kill a human.

In response to this, Johnson & Johnson proceeded carefully, deliberately, and quickly. In contrast to other large companies that would likely put themselves first, they decided to put customer safety first, by immediately alerting their consumers across the nation to not consume any Tylenol products.

Johnson & Johnson also recalled all Tylenol capsules from the market, which added up to a retail value of more than US$100m.

On top of that, they offered to exchange already purchased Tylenol capsules with tablets that did not contain cyanide, which cost them millions of dollars more.

As a result, they received much praise of their socially responsible actions from the media. Because of this, apart from many other factors, Johnson & Johnson managed to launch their comeback phase for Tylenol successfully.

They gained 24% of the market for pain relievers by the end of the same year, which was not much less than the 37% of the market that the product held before the crisis.

TACO BELL

Though their food is not personally known among many Malaysians, Taco Bell is still a famous name. A restaurant that sells Mexican fast food, Taco Bell is loved by many for their delicious meals.

However, when a rumour broke out in 2011 about the contents of their meat, some chaos ensued. In spite of the crisis, the public relations (PR) of the fast food chain diffused the situation skillfully. Everything started from a lawsuit filed by a customer, through an Alabama law firm, against the Yum! Brands chain (Taco Bell’s parent company).

The customer claimed that their seasoned ground beef only contained 35% beef, with the remaining 65% containing water, wheat, oats, soy lecithin, maltodextrin, anti- dusting agent and modified corn starch. The customer requested that Taco Bell would be honest in their advertising.

The company responded quickly, and immediately initiate a large PR campaign, declaring that the claims were false and revealed the real percentages of their seasoned beef contents, which are 88% beef and 12% secret recipe – they even went as far as to reveal their secret recipe.

Leveraging on their huge fan-base, Taco Bell used their social media platforms, on top of local newspaper advertisements, which caused them to gain much support.

With their no-nonsense attitude against the lawsuit and intelligent PR, the lawsuit was dropped less than four months later.

"Every test successfully met is rewarded by some growth in intuitive knowledge, strengthening of character, or initiation into a higher consciousness."

– Paul Brunton

"You can’t relate to a superhero, to a superman, but you can identify with a real man who in times of crisis draws forth some extraordinary quality from within himself and triumphs but only after a struggle."

– Timothy Dalton

"Grief is perhaps an unknown territory for you. You might feel both helpless and hopeless without a sense of a ‘map’ for the journey. Confusion is the hallmark of a transition. To rebuild both your inner and outer world is a major project."

– Anne Grant

"Leadership is a matter of having people look at you and gain confidence, seeing how you react. If you’re in control, they’re in control."

– Tom Landry
WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH
LEADERS SOLDIER ON

By JOHN WALTER BAYBAY
editor@leaderonomics.com

A previous article where I spoke about courage; I briefly described the situation of having to be driven into the deep forests of Mindanao in the Philippines passing at least three military checkpoints in a vehicle escorted by heavily-armed men.

While being in an area of prevalent insurgency and where kidnapping was good business, especially with the presence of international mining companies having frequent visits from well-paid expats, there is a static presence of risk and threats to security.

“TAKE ME TO THE RIOT”

While the threat looms over employees, on occasion things would escalate at an unimaginable speed and urgency that differentiates an already tense situation with an actual crisis.

A few hours before my departure, coordinators of Mindanao in the Philippines passing at least three military checkpoints in a vehicle escorted by heavily-armed men.

The silence was then broken when the engineer said: “We apologise but there has been a threat to the organisation (and its people).”

It usually takes a certain amount of experience for leaders to recognise when a threat could escalate into an actual crisis.

CONTINUE TO COMMUNICATE

At the onset of a crisis, leaders must also be able to communicate effectively in order for the organisation to suddenly switch from the prevailing “business as usual” mindset to a “crisis mindset.”

In the latter sense, a consent to direct immediate instruction and marshal resources at hand is temporarily put in the hands of a situational leader.

These crisis leaders either rise up to the occasion or are appointed immediately during the recognition or the signalling of an impending crisis.

In my experience working with the exploration and mining industries, I found that these organisations are always vacillating in the frays of risk and crisis.

They are usually subjected to natural and environmental risks, regulatory and social risks, security and insurgency/terrorist risks as well as confrontation and violence.

The environment is volatile. I have found that the best crisis leaders are those that immediately take to the field to get a firm handle of the situation.

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

It takes a certain amount of field command. An experienced crisis leader exhibits a certain “grace under pressure” while still acting urgently upon the situations presented to him/her.

The paradigms of planning still remain although these are taken up in faster cycles during a crisis. Intelligence/information and communication are paramount. These three steps are usually taken up in constant and dynamic cycles:

- Situational appraisal and intelligence reporting
- Marshalling of resources
- Execution and monitoring

Strategic and tactical interventions are taken in very quick cycles until situations are controlled.

There are lessons to be learned across various industries and it’s always useful to look back and take examples of cases of crisis leadership and management as you can never tell when these skills are needed.

I have found that the best crisis leaders are those that immediately take to the field to get a firm handle of the situation.

John Walter Baybay is a regional management consultant who has worked more than 17 years in the areas of corporate strategic planning and economic planning. He is a competitive athlete who balances his time between business coaching, family and working with communities. To read more of his articles, visit www.leaderonomics.com
THE WAY OF THE SPECIAL FORCES

LESSONS FROM THESE ELITE TROOPS

By SHAHRAN MASOOD

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THE military has been in leadership development longer than any attempts of the corporate world and training companies. For hundreds of years, nations around the world have recruited and developed their human capital to be effective leaders in combat, strategy, and decision-making. Similar to running a business, the landscape of warfare continues to evolve and change.

Business and military leaders are constantly facing new challenges, and in many ways do their best to deal with uncertainty. Military leaders need new strategies and reliable tools to adapt to fast changing and unpredictable situations.

Threats are immediate, and the manner in which situations are dealt with can make a difference between life and death. This is why the military trains its people to embody a culture of readiness in the presence of conflict, and develop committed leaders that do not flinch in times of crisis.

In a business sense, there is no better capability than readiness and clarity of thought in a crisis. This capability is the norm in the military, and there is no better group of individuals that does this better than the chosen few serving in the United States Army Special Forces.

Business leaders and managers alike can certainly learn a few things from these experts of crisis management.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT – THE SPECIAL FORCES WAY

The special forces are essentially a collection of the best military personnel from the army, navy and air force. They are highly trained and seasoned in combat, and are the most adaptable to new and unknown conditions. They are assigned to the highest priority operations, and are relied upon to bring about swift counterbalance to a crisis situation. This includes hostage scenarios, terror threats and natural disasters.

With any immediate threat, the special forces are usually “first in, last out.” For this reason they are specialists in urgent action response and unconventional warfare.

Speaking metaphorically in a business crisis, there could be “loss of life” (for example, bankruptcy, restructuration and liquidation), personal injury, asset and financial damage, not forgetting the emotional trauma during an ordeal.

In a military crisis, the same can be said – including the sense of almost complete uncertainty.

For the general public, there is a sense of freefall, and people don’t know if the situation can get any worse (or better). For this, the special forces have the training and methods to quickly and critically evaluate a situation and take action to create stability at ground zero.

SELF-ORGANISED TEAMS

In an interview with retired Lieutenant General Paul Van Ripes, corporate strategist, trainer and consultant who served 40 years in the marines, he shared his theory – including the sense of almost complete uncertainty.

“Self-organised teams don’t need lots of information to take action – they are autonomous, self-directed, empowered and accountable.”

What he means is, if you run an organisation in an autocratic micromanagement style, and if you are in control in the traditional sense, you are slow to respond to a modern day crisis.

A note to managers and business leaders, he says, “Be in command, but let the organisation self-organise. Let the ones in the cutting edge be the ones that actually make key decisions… that will be better for the organisation.”

Empowered self-organised teams like the special forces work through problems and create solutions freely and in a fluid manner.

When the clock is ticking in utmost urgency, this is the most efficient way to arrive at the best possible strategy for crisis management.

SYSTEMS APPROACH TO A CRISIS

According to Yaneer Bar-Yam, American systems scientist on the study of Complexity of Military Conflict, we can truly understand the nature of war and crisis by understanding “complex systems.” A special forces engineering perspective of crisis looks at problem solving in two ways.

“Structurally complex systems” have a strict cause and effect relationship. There is no freedom of action because problems come with definite mathematical solutions.

For example, probabilities in relation to loss of electricity in power grids, or missile speed to impact.

There is a relatively clear and measurable understanding of the problem and therefore the solution.

On the other hand, “interactively complex systems” relate to problem-solving where creating the solution relies on the experience, judgment and wisdom of the specialists working on the problem.

These “wicked problems” are the hardest to solve because of their unique nature, and the combination of many unknown variables.

Steps to understanding a crisis:

1. Understand the problem you have – do you have a tame problem (you are familiar with, in which you can recognise a pattern), or is it a problem that requires further analysis?

2. Do not launch into problem-solving mode before thoroughly understanding the problem.

3. During this process, stand back as often as possible to get a wider perspective.

4. Avoid the tendency to over-analyse. Don’t be elaborate in your approach.

5. Cognitive psychologists suggest that it is not the volume or accuracy of information but the few key bits of information that is important to understanding a problem enough to move forward.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Delving into the area of contemporary military strategy, I discovered that, today, there are over 100 countries worldwide that have their own special forces and SOPs (standard operating procedures).

With varying regional methods, it is reassuring to note that there are many tried and tested ways to approach a crisis.

The following are the common threads in the approach to military crisis management, and its direct application to business crisis management:

• INTELLIGENCE – IDENTIFY THE NATURE OF THE THREAT

“To lack intelligence is to be in the ring blindfolded.” – General David M. Shoup, former commandant of the Marine Corps.

Before deploying valuable resources and “self-organised teams”, it is critical to understand the magnitude of the crisis. That is, to clearly identify the source of the problem, and the operational environment from a few ‘on-the-ground’ perspectives.

Through this fact-finding phase we are then able to select the right tool (capabilities) for the job, and understand the timeline to use it.

Some questions to ponder include: Why has this happened? Who are the parties involved? Is this an isolated incident or a repeat occurrence?

With little resources, what can we do or leverage immediately to create stabilise – are “quick wins” available to immediately dampen the crisis effect?
DEALING WITH THE UNEXPECTED

By LEE HWAI TAH
editor@leaderonomics.com

THE shortest distance between two points is a curve. In life, things change. Circumstances change. People change. You change.

Life just happens. Life won’t cooperate sometimes. Nothing stays constant. Nothing ever stays the same the way you want it to be. Unexpected things show up.

THERE ARE NO STRAIGHT LINES

Have you noticed that there are no straight lines in nature? All the straight lines you ever see are man-made. We’re surrounded by artificial straight lines, because they’re simpler and more efficient. Straight lines create an impression of order, or probably an illusion of it.

We don’t like straight lines all that much. They rarely engage our imagination or emotional energies. Everyone recognises that straight lines in charts, organisation structures, highways, buildings and many other man-made grill-like designs don’t really reflect reality.

If you see some of the famous parks in the world (for example, Central Park in New York) where people just love to be there, there are hardly any straight lines. It feels like being in nature. It just feels natural. It feels right.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE UNEXPECTED

In the same way, you don’t expect your journeys in life to be straightforward. Why would anyone expect that? Things don’t always go as expected, especially in your pursuits of big goals. Unexpected, undesirable things do happen.

It’s what you do with the unexpected that matters. That decision determines everything.

Here are three tips to deal with the unexpected:

1. Recognise that it’s only a momentary setback. As the famous quote says, “Success is never final, failure is never fatal.” Whether “good” or “bad”, whatever you experience is never permanent. Realise that things happen because they happen, and then move on.

2. Ask yourself this question, “Am I willing to give power – a piece of my life to this?” When you let a “bad” circumstance, or someone else’s bad decision-making, determine your destiny, you give them power and a piece of your life.

3. Decide instead to keep your calm and your power to keep you moving forward to take your next choice.

COACHING POEM

I want to end this article with a beautiful poem that I find truly inspiring and empowering:

I have a feeling that my boat has struck, down there in the depths, against a great thing. And nothing happens! Nothing... Silence... Waves... Nothing happens! Or has everything happened, and we are standing now, quietly, in the new life?

Juan Ramon Jimenez

For more articles on leadership and personal development, visit www.leaderonomics.com

> FROM PAGE 4

BE IN COMMAND, BUT LET THE ORGANISATION SELF-ORGANISE. LET THE ONES IN THE CUTTING EDGE BE THE ONES THAT ACTUALLY MAKE KEY DECISIONS... THAT WILL BE BETTER FOR THE ORGANISATION

STRAIGHT LINES

“... straight lines you ever see are man-made. We’re surrounded by artificial straight lines, because they’re simpler and more efficient. Straight lines create an impression of order, or probably an illusion of it.”

- Sun Tzu, Chinese military general and strategist

To effectively navigate and take action through a crisis takes careful planning, and because time is scarce, urgency and clarity of decision-making is crucial.

Knowing what to do and when to do it, its social and economic impact, and its lasting positive effect (sustainability), are the keys to reaching the end goal as effectively as possible.

Some aspects to consider in developing good crisis management strategy are: develop multiple options, anticipate immediate and long-term effects, learn how to work with and enrol local allies, psychological effects of the people you are protecting and important stakeholders, and how to ensure credibility in all actions (moving forward with integrity).

ENGAGE THE THREAT DISCRIMINATELY

“When life attains a crisis, man’s focus narrows... The world becomes a stage of immediate concern, swept free of illusion.” – Jim Thompson, author

Because the clock is running, there is no time to waste during “damage control”. After you have set your strategy and a plan of attack, it is time to make decisive movements forward until the situation has stabilised and is under control.

Through focused intent and relentless forward motion, you can overcome a crisis with speed and efficiency.

The crucial elements of engagement are: focusing on the task at hand, following the game plan without deviation, and honing your team efforts to a single point of attack (effort) until you create the desired outcome.

THE BEST LEADERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

During leadership in times of crisis, there is real value in applying some of the lessons from the special forces, to organisations and the business world.

They are a group of committed individuals with specialised skillets that are highly adaptable to changing conditions.

They arrive at a crisis with multiple strategies, with a fluid systems mindset, and make decisive actions to take control of critical situations.

Their single-minded focus to the task at hand, clarity of thought in implementing strategy, and alignment in working in teams make them a formidable intervention to a crisis scenario.

The take-home message for managers and leaders in any organisation is that as shocking as a crisis may be, there are still options available to turn a bad situation into one of stability.

The recovery from a crisis will take some time, but at least there are solid methods to understand the impact of a problem, and with the help of others, steady the course to better times.

Shahran Masood is part of the Talent Acceleration Programme at Leaderonomics. To engage with him, email editor@leaderonomics.com. For more articles by Shahran, visit www.leaderonomics.com

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MINDFULNESS IN THE MIDST OF MADNESS

H ow to Evolve in Extreme Stress

By DR YVONNE SUM

Don’t feel that you have to do everything alone. When you are overpowered by a crisis, it is important to turn to your teammates, your followers, or your loved ones. They can help you recover and stay strong. Here are some tips on how to do it:

1. Exercise extreme self-care

When you are under extreme stress, it is important to take care of your physical, mental, and emotional health. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Eat nutritious foods
- Get enough rest
- Take constant breaks
- Stay calm
- Be mindful
- Breathe, or inspire

2. Engage in Creative Activities

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in creative activities. This can help you relax and relieve your stress. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Create your own paintings or sculptures
- Write a poem or a song
- Play a musical instrument
- Do a dance

3. Engage in Social Activities

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in social activities. This can help you connect with others and relieve your stress. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Join a sports team
- Attend a social event
- Volunteer for a cause

4. Engage in Mindfulness Practices

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in mindfulness practices. This can help you stay calm and centered. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Practice meditation
- Practice yoga
- Practice deep breathing

5. Engage in Physical Activities

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in physical activities. This can help you relieve your stress and improve your physical health. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Go for a walk
- Go for a run
- Go for a swim

6. Engage in Spiritual Practices

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in spiritual practices. This can help you connect with a higher power and relieve your stress. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Pray
- Meditate
- Read spiritual literature

7. Engage in Creative Writing

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in creative writing. This can help you express your thoughts and feelings and relieve your stress. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Write a journal
- Write a novel
- Write a screenplay

8. Engage in Creative Art

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in creative art. This can help you express your thoughts and feelings and relieve your stress. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Paint a picture
- Sculpt a sculpture
- Create a collage

9. Engage in Creative Music

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in creative music. This can help you express your thoughts and feelings and relieve your stress. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Play a musical instrument
- Sing a song
- Create a musical composition

10. Engage in Creative Dance

When you are feeling stressed, it is important to engage in creative dance. This can help you express your thoughts and feelings and relieve your stress. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Dance a dance
- Create a dance
- Perform a dance

By engaging in these activities, you can relieve your stress and improve your mental and emotional health. Remember, it is important to take care of yourself in times of stress. You are not alone, and there are many resources available to help you. So, take care of yourself, and you will be able to weather any storm.
A father’s journey of perseverance

By DORAI RAJ K
editor@leaderonomics.com

JUNE 6, 2010 – the day my son’s dreams were shattered with these words from his doctor, “Dinesh is paralysed.”

Confidence and optimism were always my virtues but the situation overwhelmed me with confusion and hopelessness. I felt I was floating aimlessly.

Before long, it struck me that a clear vision and focus were needed for my son and family. Followed by the affirmed decision of having only Plan A – my son will get back on his feet and lead normality again.

Clear objectives and utter focus on a one-way street kickstarted the journey to prove that the possibility of achieving the “impossible” lies in true grit, persistence, perseverance and optimism.

The emotional factor during the painful period had to be sidelined. Instead, limitless pressure was “forced” upon my son for every inch of improvement.

LITTLE STEPS OF SUCCESS

Achievements despite adversities were proven when he completed his Bachelor of Engineering, followed by his Master of Science, and stepped into the working world. These were despite the doubts who said these would be impossible tasks.

This definitely proves that when undying effort is exerted, goals are within reach despite obstacles, and when one does not settle for Plan B. Dinesh is definitely seen as winning this battle in his nearest future. In my humble opinion, he remains a true builder of hope for others who may be facing impossibilities – be it emotionally, mentally or physically.

So, if you stay focused with unstoppable optimism and effort, half your battle is already won.

Jonathan Yabut is the winner of the hit reality business TV show, The Apprentice Asia. He is currently based in Kuala Lumpur working with a leading airline and engages in motivation talks about youth and leadership across Southeast Asia. He has launched his book, From Grit to Great, which recounts his inspiring journey in winning the show. Follow him on Twitter @JonathanYabut. For more information, email editor@leaderonomics.com. Visit www.leaderonomics.com for more inspiring stories.

FIND THE ‘DINESH’ OF YOUR LIFE

A STORY OF TRUE Grit

By JONATHAN ALLEN YABUT
editor@leaderonomics.com

I’ll try my best not to be too dramatic on a Monday – but I just really have to share this story. This one really blew me away. Every day or two, I would receive letters and messages from people sharing their stories of challenges and success. One letter I’d never forget is the story of a 24-year-old man called Dinesh.

Last week, this young man from Kuala Lumpur messaged me on Facebook about a tragic car accident he survived. I didn’t hesitate to meet up with him for coffee on a Sunday. I asked Dinesh’s permission to share his story, and so here it is.

Four years ago, Dinesh was a typical student full of dreams and ambitions. He was about to leave for the United Kingdom to finish his penultimate year in university and was (needless to say) excited to enter a new chapter in his life.

Or, at least he thought he was going to.

THE CRASH

Weeks before his flight, Dinesh was driving back home when he met an unfortunate car crash. Humanly speaking, driving back home when he met an unfortunate car crash. Humanly speaking, driving back home when he met an unfortunate car crash. Humanly speaking, he lost control, and a car hit him head-on.

His body was thrown into an unconscious state, with a broken spinal cord, an injured spine, and an injured spinal cord. Humanly speaking, he lost control, and a car hit him head-on.

He went into coma for a week. Could he really have to share this story. This one really blew me away. Every day or two, I would receive letters and messages from people sharing their stories of challenges and success. One letter I’d never forget is the story of a 24-year-old man called Dinesh.

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THE CRASH

Weeks before his flight, Dinesh was driving back home when he met an unfortunate car crash. Humanly speaking, he lost control, and a car hit him head-on. He went into coma for a week. Could anything else be worse? I bit my lips and squinted my eyes as he recalled the scenes.

But Dinesh survived the accident. He went through a series of invasive operations. While he was a strong man both inside and out, he was unfortunately paralysed. He lost touch with some people along the way. Depression, loneliness, and hopelessness followed.

While his doctors thought he was going to be bedridden for the rest of his life, Dinesh was persistent in believing that he could walk again. “I am a total believer of mind over matter,” he said.

He consistently underwent therapy. Within the next two years, he got out of bed and shocked the doctors when he started moving with a wheelchair.

THE RETURN

Years later, Dinesh defied more medical experts when he started walking with just crutches! He even finished a master’s degree after the accident, and is now working in a management and talent consulting company. Take that, world!

“Dinesh, I wish I was a movie producer. I would make a movie out of you! You have no idea how inspiring your story is for everyone facing problems out there!” I told Dinesh during our coffee meeting. I was seriously teary-eyed. I have never met someone who underwent such tragedy and bounced back in such a short time. And I know this is another cliché to say, but Dinesh reminds me of what I’ve been talking about like an old broken record – grit.

He knew that in order to walk again, he had to work hard every day and develop himself physically and mentally – not for days, nor weeks, nor months, but for years. Years and years and years. Can you imagine how it feels to know your journey will take years and years? Personally, I would easily give up because I am an impatient guy. Dinesh, however, remained persistent.

And he still is, because his journey is not yet complete. Thanks to consistent therapy, his target is to walk without crutches within the next two years. From the bottom of my heart, I really wish him the best.

THE REFLECTION

Whenever I have a big problem in life – be it a personal or career-related challenge – Dinesh now easily comes to mind. If he successfully got out of his challenge, I can face life’s harsh challenges too.

And yes, surrounding yourself with the right people also helps (in Dinesh’s case, he mentioned that his father was both his personal coach and inspiration). We need an anchor in our lives no matter how strong we are.

One in a while, we need to be reminded that no matter how bad our problems are, someone out there is also facing a problem that may even be worse. If Dinesh could rise up to his challenge, I believe I can too.

I hope you get to meet a “Dinesh” in your life who will forever inspire you during your lowest times. We all need one.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The story was originally posted on Yabut’s The Apprentice Asia official Facebook fanpage on Aug 25, 2014 and reprinted with permission.

Jonathan Yabut is the winner of the hit reality business TV show, The Apprentice Asia. He is currently based in Kuala Lumpur working with a leading airline and engages in motivation talks about youth and leadership across Southeast Asia. He has launched his book, From Grit to Great, which recounts his inspiring journey in winning the show. Follow him on Twitter @JonathanYabut. For more information, email editor@leaderonomics.com. Visit www.leaderonomics.com for more inspiring stories.
We never know when a co-worker or one of his/her family members dies. It can happen through sudden losses, like the MH370 and MH17 tragedies, or deaths due to old age and sickness.

As such, we can end up feeling unprepared and inadequate to face a co-worker’s loss and ensuing grief.

Eminent historian Philippe Aries concluded in his landmark study that we have distanced ourselves so much from our contact with death that the subject has become a taboo and forbidden than ever before.

Not only are we inadequately socialised and equipped by modern society in the issues of dying, death and bereavement, our ethnic cultures can also be unhelpful towards the grieving process.

For example, typically, Malay relatives and friends are only expected to say words to help the bereaved accept death as God’s will.

For the traditional Chinese, death is seen as a curse and words that sound like death (for instance, the number four) are avoided.

Disclosure of grief to outsiders is considered a betrayal of family honour.

The Hindus see death as a transition into a reborn cycle and an 11-day ritual is performed for the deceased’s passage to the other world. Excessive lamenting is also discouraged.

**DEATH UNSPOKEN**

As a result, death becomes a culturally "toxic" subject. Talking about death is often avoided not only at home but also in the workplace, where most people spend more of their waking hours than anywhere else.

On one hand, a co-worker in grief may upset the other employee in the workplace, hampers the work environment and compromise productivity.

On the other hand, companies expect business as usual from their employees irrespective of what they go through in their private lives.

So it is in the best interest of both management and staff that the grief of a bereaved co-worker is understood, properly processed and contained, and not made worse or prolonged by silent avoidance, unspoken isolation, or pressure for them to relate and work as before.

Indeed, your colleagues’ recovery from grief can be facilitated by appropriate and compassionate care and support, shown in the workplace in the following ways:

**WHAT CAN MANAGEMENT DO?**

1. Acknowledge the loss of the bereaved.
   - Let them know you understand the magnitude of their pain and show them you care for their wellbeing.
   - For a start, you can initiate a financial collection and send them flowers, sympathy cards and donation. Attend the wake and funeral services.
   - During free times, help them to open up and talk about their experience, if necessary, over and over again.
   - However, if they prefer to be silent, give them the space to be so. Respect their desire for privacy and confidentiality.

2. Offer domestic assistance like buying food, running errands, fetching the children from school and helping to settle banking or other estate matters.

3. Don’t exclude the bereaved person in the department’s social plans but let them decide whether to accept or decline the invitation.

4. Remember that the initial three months, holidays and anniversaries are the toughest times for a grieving person.

**WHAT CAN CO-WORKERS DO?**

1. Let them know you understand the magnitude of their pain and show them you care for their wellbeing.

2. For loss of immediate family members, grant the bereaved worker a few days of compassionate leave and provide flexible time off for essential errands.

3. Be non-judgmental and more accommodating if their work performance is affected, but expect a return to their pre-loss productivity within several months.

4. If the bereaved employee is showing difficulties in coping with the loss, avail the person to the services of a grief counselor or support group.

**WHAT TO SAY?**

1. Tell them you can never fully know the depths of their pain but you are there for them.

2. Remind them that they need not bear the grief alone, as there are people who care for them.

3. Ask them how they are doing, and if they do talk, listen to them attentively. Show concern about their struggles, however trivial they may seem to you.

4. Say what is sincere and comforting but don’t talk too much.

**GRIEF AT THE WORKPLACE**

**FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS, FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE**

Just being there for them is sometimes better than a thousand words.

**WHAT NOT TO SAY?**

1. Don’t say platitudes like “You have to move on.” (They may not know how)

2. Don’t say unhelpful words like “Don’t cry.” (They should be given the liberty to cry all they want.)

3. Don’t say “Call me when you need help.” (Instead, offer specific help to them.)

4. Don’t say anything to compare, evaluate, judge or solicit sympathy for yourself.

**A TIME FOR MOURNING, A TIME FOR RECOVERING**

There are no quick fixes to grief. Grief is a natural process because we are wired to mourn what we are. I personally know of several top-level corporate executives who were unable to cope with grief that they committed suicide as a fast way of escaping the pain.

Proper care and support in their workplaces would have made a big difference and possibly saved their lives.

Essentially, we need to remember that grief in the workplace results not only from the loss of a loved one, but also in all other types of tangible calamities like the loss of properties, health, denied promotions as well wealth and investments issues.

There are also intangible losses like separation, divorce, miscarriage and losing custody of a child.
JAZZING UP LEADERSHIP
RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

By KOH EARN SOO & TEAM
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UTOH Frank J. Barrett sees jazz bands as organisations designed for innovation. Drawing upon his experience in both management and jazz, he uses jazz improvisation to outline principles for the best models of improvisation and innovation in organisations. His book, Yes to the Mess, is about how leaders can understand and facilitate the innovation process.

ALL THAT JAZZ

Today’s fast-paced environment almost guarantees that the best-laid plans will be derailed. In such turbulence, Barrett believes that the best model for businesses today lies in jazz.

He uses jazz improvisation to illustrate that organisations are made up of diverse, independent specialists who make quick, irreversible decisions without knowing where they will end up. Improvisation is key, and Barrett believes that the best model for businesses today lies in jazz.

Barrett first realised how closely connected his two pursuits of management and jazz were when a student interrupted his management class with a seemingly irrelevant question, out of curiosity. Wanting to encourage it, Barrett discussed the question for the entire lesson, then realised that he had covered the original topic in more depth than ever before.

He began to seek such unexpected elements in all his classes, and great teaching opportunities abounded. He then realised that in business, just as in jazz, the great moments are always those which happen along the way — if we let them.

And just like jazz, organisations need a model of “diverse independent specialists” who jump in before they have a well-thought-out plan.

THE IMPROV PARADOX

There is a myth that jazz players are untrained musicians who pluck notes out of thin air. In fact, jazz is extremely complex. Jazz players require a persistent pursuit of learning and a disciplined imagination in order to improvise.

Jazz players first learn to improvise by repeating and mimicking other players. Each player builds a repertoire of phrases and patterns through imitation and memorisation.

After years of such imitation, musicians recognise which patterns fit within different forms and are able to identify the various options available. They then combine, extend, vary and shift the contours of various phrases to produce a new phrase.

The same is true of organisational leaders. Great leaders are distinc- tively different from others. They learn, by their ability to strategise possibilities as well as adapt and adjust in the midst of action.

Both jazz soloists and organisational leaders also face the same paradox: over-reliance on learned patterns can limit the risk-taking necessary for creative growth. Both need to relinquish some degree of control to go “go with the flow.”

In other words, Barrett says, “Act first “as if” this will work; pay attention to what shows up; venture forth; make sense later.”

ON THE WAY TO YES — ABANDONING ROUTINES

The saxophonist Sonny Rollins has been considered the greatest living improviser. Rollins is almost as famous for his mistakes as for his “successful” innovations.

In the 1950s, he was well-known and successful, playing and recording with great musicians.

However, in 1959, Rollins mysteriously quit playing. This is because he had to break the habit of playing the same phrases solo after solo.

For three years, Rollins played alone under the Williamsburg Bridge near his home, stopping himself whenever he heard himself play a familiar routine.

He then recorded an album titled, The Bridge. Though initially rejected by critics due to the dramatic departure from his usual style, the album is now considered one of the 10 most important jazz recordings ever made.

Rollins’ efforts to break his familiar routine were an affirmative move. He let go of the familiar in order to welcome new possibilities.

Intelli’s Andy Grove did the same. Grove and Intel co-founder Gordon Moore decided to move out of the dynamic random-access memory or DRAM technology industry (Intel’s core business at the time) into the microprocessor industry, which was an uncharted territory then.

This move was hugely profitable, and was only made possible because he and Moore let go of the routines.

YES TO THE MESS

A manager’s first instinct is to diligently avoid messes, eliminating them when possible and cleaning up thoroughly when they happen.

Jazz musicians say “yes” to the mess by learning through action, rejecting routine behaviour and safe predictability in favour of experimentation and progress.

Both parties need to constantly challenge routines and experiment, as this is the only way to move forward.

Herman Miller, a Michigan-based furniture manufacturer, has been committed to sustainability since the 1990s.

Consistent with this principle, they hired William McDonough to design a “green” manufacturing plant, complete with an innovative “green” roof of soil, vegetables and flowers.

Large colonies of aggressive wasps began to inhabit the roof, and company executives faced a dilemma. The conventional method to eliminate the wasps was through pesticides, which went against the company’s values.

Instead, Herman Miller decided to import 600,000 bees in 12 hives and establish them on the roof. The wasps eventually left, and Herman Miller was left with a “green” honey, which they bottled and gave to visitors as a goodwill gesture.

By experimenting with the bees, the company showed an unrelenting, affirmative mindset such as that adopted by jazz musicians. They are confident that amidst the chaos, they will be able to find a positive and creative pathway out.

JAZZ AS CONTINUOUS NEGOTIATION: SAYING YES TO THE GROOVE

Jazz players constantly engage with one another, interpreting and anticipating the melodies of others’ music while shaping their own creations. They are continually constrained and facilitated by each other’s musical ideas.

This is important as jazz bands seek a balance between order and disorder, a “built-in instability.” Players need to rely on each other, allowing a discernible pattern to emerge without the presence of a single controller.

The goal of every jazz performance is to achieve a groove, where players are mutually oriented to the beat and have a common sense of beat and meter.

Once this groove is achieved, musicians experience the activity as if it is coming from outside the group, rather than themselves. Moreover, they begin performing beyond their capabilities.

To achieve a groove, organisations need to create corporate cultures where their team can engage with each other, allowing a discernible pattern to emerge without the presence of a single controller.

LEADING BY SAYING YES TO THE BEST OF WHAT EXISTS

In 1501, Michaelangelo was commissioned to create a statue of David for a Florence cathedral. His famous David was carved from a piece of marble previously discarded by Agostino di Duccio.

In his words, Michaelangelo simply needed to “clear the rest of the marble away in order to bring David out.” His success lay in his capacity to envision a successful outcome — an approach to learning that points towards bold innovation.

We often choose to avoid loss rather than acquire gain, especially during stressful times. While this is understandable, such mindset hinders the discovery process, prevents learning, and can cause one to overlook opportunities.

Jazz improvisers work towards discovery in times of stress. They avoid old habits even if such habits seem like the quickest way to resolve problems, understanding the value of intelligent risk-taking and leap in.

Koh Earn Soo and his team take the best books and summarise them into shorter, readable content in the hope of inspiring people to read more and learn more. To read the full-length summary of this book and summaries of other bestsellers, subscribe to www.thebestbookssummary.com

IMPROVISATION IS KEY, AND BARRETT BELIEVES THAT THE BEST MODEL FOR BUSINESSES TODAY LIES IN JAZZ.
From Testing to Testimony

NEVER GIVE UP, NEVER SURRENDER

By JEREMY TAN
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HUMBLE BEGINNINGS
I was an average child – no, let’s rephrase that – the slightly below average child who didn’t really score well in exams, problematic to most, if not all teachers and a fidgety rascal. At the age of 16, being in a public school, I chose to be in the sub-science stream, as I thought it would bring convenience to myself. Also, I thought I would never need biology in the future.

I decided against going into the arts stream which was where students were unfortunately stereotyped as being more “problematic” – as if I was not problematic myself. I was that type of person who was unmotivated, lazy and, above all, lost. My daily routine used to consist of taking naps from 2pm until late evening, and then spending the rest of my nights browsing through the web.

Studies were definitely not one of my priorities or concern. As the major examination for every high school student approached, I was about to sit for one of the biggest exams that would affect the course of my life: the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM).

Despite the fact that most people were panicking by then, I was still impervious.

True enough, upon receiving the results a few months after the examination, the path that I took had led me to “come a cropper”. The consequences didn’t really hit me then, but it didn’t take long. I left for three months of National Service, isolated from familiar faces and started a new small adventure.

It was a really enlightening experience, but that’s another story.

The main significance it carried was that when I returned, I was lost. People I knew were already in college making new friends and stories, and I was just lost in the wilderness of the transition phase.

I looked for advice on what to do, and people kept telling me: Do what you love. It didn’t mean much to me then.

I was still debating the possibility of even being able to pursue science but was advised that with the results I had, it was nothing more than a child’s fantasy and that I should accept the reality that my paths were rather limited.

THE JOURNEY
I was pretty set by then to pursue something related to the arts, in the Malaysian context. I thought I’d probably just go for a foundation in arts, maybe get an economics degree, perhaps do something in business or marketing, possibly even get a mass communications degree.

Ultimately, these options weren’t what I’d see myself doing, or to phrase it, “Doing what I love”. It’s not to say that those degrees which I mentioned are inferior to the sciences or play a less significant role, but they were the only options which I was actually able to opt for. Beggar can’t be choosers, after all.

Everything was spiraling down for me. I was lost, yet pressured and rushed to make an option to avoid wasting more time.

By then, it was already May and I had used up six months just idling away. Until one day, I was reminded by a dear friend about a small dream I had used to have before taking my SPM – a dream to do medicine.

Not just because it is a job that is “high class”, or that it is cool to be called a doctor, but because I was interested in taking a special course that comes after a degree in medicine, which is geriatrics. The privilege of working with old people is something that really brings me joy and peace.

I have been mostly brought up by my grandmother. She is someone I have always looked up to. I still recall how many of my English essays would be about her whenever the topics were “Write about your role model,” or “Write about a person who impacted your life.” Grandma would always be in mind.

The person who never gave up on me and who always encouraged me made a huge impact on my lifestyle.

THE CHALLENGES
However, I did not have biology as part of my subject combination in SPM. The thought of doing medicine was then easily forgotten and given up, as most colleges would not accept a student without a biology background, especially to take it as a subject in pre-university.

Nonetheless, the same friend who reminded me about my dream of doing medicine urged me to fight for it, and so I did.

I determinately went to education fairs for inquiries and even visited multiple colleges to inquire about almost all the programmes they offered.

Sure enough, I was rejected, again and again, to the point that I stopped applying as I was pretty sure of the outcome.

Yet one day, I was given a shot by a college to do the Australian matriculation programme with the subject combination of Biology, Chemistry, Maths, Psychology and English. This combination entitled me to pursue medicine, should I make the required grade.

Although the registrar I spoke to said that even getting a C or a low B would be a miracle in college with the SPM results I had, I was still blessed enough to be given a chance to do those subjects.

CLOSURE
Fast-forward to the end of college, I managed to do well and was even a subject of discussion among lecturers as a person who did biology without a biology background.

Without a doubt, it was with the help of my lecturers that I managed to succeed, although it also took a lot of self-determination and strength. Finally I applied to a medical school, and with the results I achieved from my college, was accepted.

Upon opening that e-mail which said “Congratulations” along with the conditional offer of admission, I froze. Recalling the hard times and the joy, it was all worth it in the end.

My small dream of becoming a geriatrician when I was a high school student is now finally becoming a reality.

To be honest, I’m not here to promulgate my accomplishments or boast about how great I did. At times, I’m still lazy, and I still do badly in tests. Nonetheless, I’m learning and I don’t give up without a fight.

Do What You love.

Jeremy is an aspiring geriatrician who is currently doing the MBBS programme in International Medical University who hopes to always do what he loves and to give his best. You can find more What’s After SPM articles on www.leaderonomics.com

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LEARN IT FROM OUR HEROES

By HYMA PILLAY
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ECENTLY, Marvel released yet another action-packed superhero movie — The Guardians of the Galaxy. The movie is said to be one of the best Marvel movies so far. This movie buff — yours truly — knew that she had to watch the movie after reading the great reviews, and as usual, I am here to share with you the lessons I’ve put together from this movie.

One takeaway from this movie is how to prepare your team for a time when crisis hits. Oh! Before I go on, I must warn you of spoilers!

If you haven’t watched the movie, you might want to stop here, go watch the movie, then come back and read this article.

The story revolves around a group of ordinary, extraordinary people, named Peter Quill, Gamora, Rocket Raccoon, Groot and Drax the Destroyer who end up in circumstances which need them to save the galaxy from being destroyed by the evil Ronan the Accuser.

In the end, the heroes managed to successfully handle the crisis at hand and “de-feet” (pun intended) Ronan.

Here are some tips on how to prepare your team for times of crisis:

1. Always have a plan of action
   in hand, but also be prepared to improvise
   The plan to escape from Klyn was spearheaded by Rocket. He carefully thought out an elaborate plan, knew exactly everything that he needed, and who in the team would be best at getting them there to everyone’s surprise, Groot jumps the gun and pulls out the battery, which was supposed to be the last step, leaving them with only a few minutes to get everything else. Instead of panicking, the team immediately jumps to action and plays their part of the game, and they managed to escape in time.

2. Planning ahead for a crisis is highly important. Team leaders should always make sure that their team is well prepared and equipped when a crisis hits. As a team leader, a good thing to do is to know your team members and their capacities well. This would help you to better delegate tasks and roles during a crisis. Remember also to have a few back-up plans, and to avoid panic attacks in case things don’t go according to Plan A.

3. Learn important skills
   The Guardians had to pick up a few new skills and responsibilities along their journey to save the galaxy from Ronan. They had to fly spaceships they had never flown before, learn to trust people they had never met before, and fight battles they never expected to find themselves in.

4. To train your team to be prepared for times of crisis, encourage them to pick up new skills which would come in handy.

5. For example, you can sign up for a first aid training class. It would also be good to encourage your team to take up new responsibilities, and to give them small projects to be in charge of. This way, when the time comes for them to take the lead in times of crisis, it would not be something that they are uncomfortable with, as they have already had experiences in leading teams.

6. Keep calm
   Although the predicament they were in was a huge one, the Guardians somehow managed to keep calm at all times, and even added humour to many of the situations.

   One of my favourite scenes from the movie was when Peter tried to distract Ronan by singing and dancing. It is easier to think with a clear mind when you are calm. Getting worked up and panicking will only make things worse. It is also easier for the people around you to stay calm when they see that their leader is calm. After all, why panic when you already have an elaborate, brilliant escape plan sorted out?

   Have confidence in yourself, and you will be able to save the day and avert the crisis at hand!

   “I found something inside myself. Something incredibly heroic.” — Peter Quill

   Hyma Pillay is operations leader of the leaderonomics.com editorial team. She writes for a living so she can save enough money to buy a spaceship. You can read more of her articles at www.leaderonomics.com