A STRATEGIC PARTNER
HUMAN RESOURCES DRIVING BUSINESS
PAGES 6–7

Treat and tweak!
Simple changes in an environment for better habits
Pg 03-04

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND
Nuggets of wisdom from Jamie Andrew
Pg 04

HARMONISING MELODY
A music therapist’s passion for tunes and people
Pg 10

GEN-Z: BY NO MEANS THE LAST
Make way for the new generation
Pg 12
INVESTING IN THE WHO INVEST IN YOUR PEOPLE

THIS week, we focus on the strategic role of human resources (HR). Old yet still enlightening, I am reminded of the tale of the tail of the elephant and the blind men, or a version of it! I have had close to two decades of work experience under my belt (and hope that I too, am old yet still enlightening) in academia, private, quasi-government and non-governmental organisation sectors, and now a social enterprise, and understood the role of HR very differently.

In fact, always assumed their role to be strategic more than operational – and been disappointed in varying degrees over the years.

The recognition of the strategic role of HR in driving business is, however, here to stay, and organisations are increasingly beginning to walk the talk by bringing HR to the (C-suite) table. TalentCorp just recently launched an initiative to enhance and strengthen the HR function.

All leaderonomics, our HR leader is very much involved in developing and executing HR strategies that are aligned with our overarching strategy, and yet, with our CEO, has the time, commitment and wherewithal to figure out that grass is IN the office, amongst other things, plays a role in keeping us engaged and burgeoning with ideas to take us to the next level.

With years of experience in HR, Fong Suet Ling asserts that HR practitioners have evolved to be business partners, key partners in managing change, as well as the catalyst for company growth. We also had the opportunity to connect with a senior leader who very generously shares his journey from being a computer engineer, managing change, as well as the catalyst for company growth. Amongst other things, plays a role in keeping us engaged and burgeoning with ideas to take us to the next level.

Let’s end on a high note, shall we? Every so often, we get to hear, I highlight two: reasons, but for the fact I am edging closer to the end of my box of everyone.

Do you have an opinion you’d like to share with us? Visit leaderonomics.com or write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com

For advertising and advertorials, please contact Pravin Kumar at pravin.kumar@leaderonomics.com or +6011 2377 7850

The opinions expressed in this career guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.

1. The average time spent by recruiters to look at a resume ranges between five and seven seconds!
2. According to experts, we only have roughly seven seconds to make a first impression!
3. Eighty-nine per cent of recruiters hired someone via LinkedIn, and 93% of recruiters are likely to look at a candidate’s social media profile.
4. Seventy-six per cent of resumes are discarded due to an unprofessional email address.
5. Blue and gray are said to be better colours to wear to an interview.

TUNE IN

Want practical tips for success on your way home from work? We’re on every Friday from 6pm to 7pm.

JOIN US!

Would you like to contribute to this career guide? Write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com or visit leaderonomics.com

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3
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Here are a couple of the fuels to these pressures, rising customer expectations, and others.

In order to combat these factors, HR has to come in to save the day by aligning the business’ needs and HR’s activities. According to BusinessDictionary.com, a strategic partner is a party with which a long-term agreement is reached for sharing of physical and/or intellectual resources in achievement of defined common objective.

As with other leaders, the HR leader needs to also be able to communicate well, making strategic HR understandable to the management team and implementable.

Read on for more interesting and thoughtful articles!
Changing Habits Can be as Easy as Tweak The Surroundings

By ROSHAN THIRAN
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LAST year, I started to get worried about my employees at Leaderonomics. I noticed that they were interacting less with each other; many opting to work from home instead (we practise flexible work policies). I recalled many occasions, late into the evenings, when Hui Ming (our co-founder) and I were the only people in the office.

Part of the problem was that we had grown so fast, doubling our headcount in a few months, causing significant space congestion. But my bigger concern was similar to that shared by Google – a lot of the interactions were responsible for innovation such as Gmail and Street View. Like me, it believed it was critical to ensure employees were at the office interacting with each other daily.

Whilst working at home is great for work-life balance, it does nothing to help ideation and creativity. I faced a significant challenge. It had become habitual for people to work from home. I could mandate that people work from the office but this would have resulted in very unhappy employees.

This is as evidenced from Yahoo!, where chief executive officer, Marissa Mayer’s mandate for all employees to be at the office had created numerous issues and tension.

So, knowing this fully well, we decided to tweak the environment instead.

NO PLACE LIKE ‘HOME’

We built a new office that felt like home. Google believed that casual employee conversations were responsible for innovations such as Gmail and Street View. Like me, it believed it was critical to ensure employees were at the office interacting with each other daily. Whilst working at home is great for work-life balance, it does nothing to help ideation and creativity.

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So, knowing this fully well, we decided to tweak the environment instead.

There was no policy change. Nor was there any mandate. Just a small tweak in the environment drove a change in behaviour. How is this possible?

RESEARCH CLEARLY SHOWS THAT PEOPLE ARE GENERALLY NOT THE ROOT OF PROBLEMS.

Situations are.

SHAPING A PATH

I recently read a great book by brothers Chip and Dan Heath entitled Switch. The brothers constantly heard people saying that “change is hard” and “people hate change”. Interestingly to them, if change was hard, they wondered why people joyously embrace change daily – like getting married, or having children, or getting a new phone.

On the contrary, they wondered why some trivial changes, like submitting an expense report on time, are often met with fierce resistance.

Their research concluded that our brains have two “systems” – a rational and an emotional system. When these two systems are in alignment, change comes easily, and when they’re not, change can be grueling.

So how does one reach this alignment?

According to the brothers, one of the ways to achieve this alignment is to “shape a path”. They believed that if we change the environment so that a new path is created, most people will follow the new path.

COOL COUCH

In their book, they provide an example of a history teacher (Bart Millar) who was frustrated by two students who frequently came late and were constantly disrupting the class.

Most teachers would have assumed that these two students were "bad apples" and kick them out of the class. But Millar assumed otherwise.

He believed that the reason they were late and disruptive was due to the environment.

Cool students sit at the back of the class. Cool students have a delusion that their disruptive behaviour makes them class "protagonists".

So, he decided to "tweak the environment".

He bought a cool couch and put it in front of the classroom. The first students to the class daily could sit on the couch (and slouch). Cool students sit at the back of the class. Cool students have a delusion that their disruptive behaviour makes them class "protagonists".

Guess who immediately started coming early to class? His two disruptive students came early each day and "volunteered" to sit in front of the class.

PEOPLE ARE NOT THE PROBLEM

Research clearly shows that people are generally not the root of problems. Situations are. Most of the time we attack a problem by assuming that it is a people problem.

According to famous Stanford psychologist Lee Ross, people are frequently blinded to the power of situations. He instead attributes what he terms as "fundamental attribution error" to people.

His research concludes that we tend to attribute people’s behaviour to “the way they are” instead of “the situation they are in”, which is the most likely factor.

A number of years ago, I was running...
NO TO SELF-SABOTAGE

In response to my question on what he thought was the No. 1 limitation that people tend to impose on themselves, a limitation that results in a “growth stunt” as a person, Andrew replied, “A limitation would be believing in failure before you even start to try something.”

“From the beginning, you must believe it is possible. If you try, it is not likely to work – it is impossible because failure becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Andrew says that if someone has negative self-beliefs, he or she would often say, “Well I can’t do that because…” or “but…” They are all self-imposed. “I am as guilty of it now as I was before. Often I still have to take myself aside and tell myself that I can achieve my goals.”

“I work with people around me and leverage their skills, while still believing in myself,” says Andrew.

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABIES

We asked Andrew, “Which incident as a speaker has impacted you and stuck with you the most?”

“I speak to a vast range of people. The audience I find the most impactful and inspiring are often school children. Their minds are so open. They take my story at face value, without any preconceived notions. And they ask me anything! My own children – they don’t see me as disabled, or inspirational. They see me as just dad.”

This being a phone interview, I couldn’t see Andrew’s expression when he replied – but I could clearly “hear” the smile in his voice!

Inspired by Andrew, this writer has put what some might call her innate stubbornness to good use, brave the morning traffic to swim before work and to silence the arsenal of creative excuses she usually has for herself. Goggles on!

> FROM PAGE 3

TWEAKING THE ENVIRONMENT IS ABOUT MAKING THE RIGHT BEHAVIOUR A LITTLE BIT EASIER AND THE WRONG BEHAVIOUR A LITTLE BIT HARDER

an organisation which was a joint venture (JV) between a global multinational corporation (MNC) and a government-owned company.

The culture of the organisation was modelled after the local organisation, where there was minimal growth, and the environment facilitated low productivity.

Employees constantly took smoking breaks and were totally unmotivated to improve or support business growth.

In fact, whenever we had new work coming in, most of the employees got extremely upset. As I walked into this new company, it would have been easy for me to look around and blame the people.

Having worked in a global company, it was clear that the quality of the people was the main cause of the poor performance of the company.

Instead of taking out my “chopping block” and starting to “bring in better people”, we decided to “tweak the situation”.

What if Lee Ross was right and the real issue was not the people but the situation?

HOW A FENCE TRANSFORMS

We started our “transformation” programme by doing the oddest thing – we built a fence. As this JV was situated in the midst of the local company’s operations, the culture of the low-productivity local partner became the dominant culture of this new JV company.

By building a fence, we tweaked the environment in the hopes of creating a new high-performance culture.

In a matter of weeks, we saw surprising results. Smoking breaks became less frequent as it was very inconvenient to smoke inside this new fenced entity.

We started driving new initiatives and people seemed to respond.

Within two years, we became one of the most productive organisations in the world in that industry. The fence had done wonders!

Tweaking the environment is about making the right behaviour a little bit easier and the wrong behaviour a little bit harder.

Peter Gollwitzer, a professor of psychology, argues that most people preload decisions with no conscious deliberation. When people pre-decide, “they “pass the control of their behaviour on to the environment”.

So, how do leaders design an environment in which undesired behaviours are made not only harder but impossible?

TWEAKING THE APPLE

In 1992, there were 2,154 murders and 626,882 serious crimes committed in New York City. Within five years, New York City murders had dropped almost 70% and serious crimes dropped by 50%.

I happened to be working and living in the city at that period and witnessed the transformation from a dangerous city into one of the safest cities.

How did its crime rate drop within a short period to an all-time low? The simple answer: tweaking the environment.

The team at New York City focused only on eliminating petty crimes and fixing all broken windows and graffiti in the city. They worked tirelessly to clean all graffiti in the subways.

With the subways looking cleaner and petty crime reduced, it created an impression that crime was not part of the environment of the city. Soon, the bigger crimes disappeared.

SETTING THE SCENE

Generally, great leaders don’t immediately assert the culpability of undesired behaviour to “bad people”. Instead of solely blaming their people, they think, “How can I set up a situation that brings out the good in these people?”

Remember, when the situation changes, behaviour changes too. So change the situation.

According to the Heath brothers, “tweaking the environment” can be as simple as moving your alarm clock to the other side of your bed so that you won’t be able to hit the snooze button easily.

To encourage yourself to exercise in the morning, instead of wishing to be healthy, try laying out your gym clothes at night so that it is the first thing you see when you get up.

Simple tweaks may yield significant returns not only for business leaders, but also individuals.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Big problem, small solution. Big problems are rarely solved with complex solutions. Often, they are solved by a sequence of small solutions.

Just like how New York City solved its massive crime problems through smaller interventions, tweaking your environment may be a far superior solution than implementing a big dramatic change.

The bigger question: Can you design an environment in which all undesired behaviours are made harder, whilst desired behaviours become the norm?

If you do so, you are on something great – driving change the easy way!
ROLLING HR’S ROLE
MORE THAN JUST PAYROLL

THE EVOLUTION OF HR
Although this perception has not changed much, the role of HR has definitely evolved over the decades.
Most transactional and administrative-inclined activities such as payroll, attendance tracking, compensation and benefits have been automated or are being streamlined with the existence of centres of excellence, i.e. HR shared services functions to allow the CHRO to be fulfilled with higher efficiency within a shorter timeframe.

If we talk about tasks, HR is often labelled as a non-revenue generating department. The value which HR brings to the company can’t be measured in the most tangible manner either.

Some of the predictions include:
- HR will need to become more like marketing.
- Strategic thinking will become HR’s new core competence.

HR AS A VALUE ADDER ENTITY
So, how exactly does HR add value to current organisations that link to its future direction? Here are some of my personal observations.

1. HR practitioners as business partners
If HR personnel are not invited during business meetings, something is not right. Collaboration between HR and various departments in an organisation has increased to ensure that more informed decisions can be made by both parties. Some multinational companies have a system in place whereby HR business partners are assigned to a certain staff population in the organisation.

This is to intensify the connection between HR and the business operations. It also helps translate HR data into business terms.
Business units are also able to leverage on HR’s data and support to better manage employees’ performance and morale in a consistent manner.

Given the emerging trends in HR, it is sensible for HR to be more of a business partner than just a support unit with limited interactions with business units.
To involve HR in making business-related decisions is akin to buying insurance before traveling.
You have more ground covered and have the upper hand in managing any consequences related to human resources should they arise as a result of business decisions made.

2. HR as key partners in managing change
With a rapid shift in business models, organisation structures change in a greater scale compared to before.
During times of restructuring, HR has a vital role to play to ensure that staff who are affected are provided a platform to raise their concerns.
It is not solely related to compensations awarded but focuses on partnering with leaders within the affected departments.
Interventions such as employer–employee dialogue, counseling, and new job placements are part of HR’s scope to safeguard employees’ welfare and manage the transition to be as smooth as possible.
These are not easy duties and comprehensive planning from HR’s end is crucial to prevent attrition rates from skyrocketing during times like these.

3. HR as catalyst for company growth
The Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management, for example, has been organising the Malaysian HR Awards (since 1999) to provide recognition to the HR community for applying HR strategies to spur business KPIs (key performance indicators).
When we look at the awards presented to employers of choice, companies generally emphasise that their HR plays a major role in their workers’ learning and development, values-based method of recruitment and talent management – as compared to skill matching and incentives given to retain employees.
These feats cannot be achieved without HR standing in as the agent to strategise, cultivate and promote desirable work environments, which in turn translates to strong attraction for top talents to pursue their careers.

CONCLUSION
HR is indeed shifting to a more strategic quadrant and moving away from stereotypical views of “just another maintenance unit”. So if someone were to ask me again, what exactly does HR do? I would say... “HR is like a mechanic, keeping the engines of the organisation well-oiled to produce optimal performance – the engines being the people’s skill, policy and processes, and the company’s culture.”

To engage with Foong Suet Ling, email her at editor@leaderonomics.com. For more insightful articles, visit www.leaderonomics.com

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF HR
THE 14th Malaysia HR Awards 2014 organised by the Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management (MIHRM), with global status and recognition, in smart partnership with a leading online job portal, serves as an excellent platform for the HR (human resources) community to share and exchange ideas, as well as learning from one another, with regard to the HR function.

It recognises standards and excellence in the following areas:
- Organisations for sustained and continuous commitment to its human talents development and nation-building
- Organisations that have successfully implemented new or re-engineered HR initiatives or transformed traditional HR practices, products or concepts leading to higher productivity and efficiency
- SMES (small and medium-sized enterprises) for a sustained commitment to its human talents development
- Organisations that have developed excellent best practices in the area of people management
- Individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to HR management and to the organisation/community
- Individuals who have made a significant contribution to any specialised HR function
- The best research project done by MBA graduates on subjects related to talent management, performance management or leadership development

Previous award winners include well-recognised companies such as Shell Business Service Centre, Agilent Technologies, CIMB Group, IBM Malaysia, Ellen, KPI Selangor Specialist Hospital and Dell Global Business Centre.

Similarly as in previous years, this year’s nominations have come from a variety of industries in Malaysia.
For more information, email editor@leaderonomics.com
IT’S NOT ENOUGH JUST TO KEEP THE ENGINES RUNNING...

By ELISA DASS KAHAN
elisadasskahaneconomics.com

DO much has been said, taught, preached and written about this hit, the early adopters in the nation are buried, and many small and large organisations alike are still uncertain of how to transform human resource (HR) into a strategic arm of the organisation.

“...Then in the face of a crisis, when the going gets tough, who has he made this seemingly endless consulting statement.

However, while we need some of the tactical HR aspects to be present, it shouldn’t be the only reason on existence.

With the corporate world becoming so competitive, just being operational for HR (and any other department) will not suffice anymore for an organisation who wishes to be on top of their game.

Many leaders are aware of the talent war and that to truly succeed and survive in this competitive, just being operational for HR is not enough. It’s not enough to keep the engines building a strategic HR that drives the business.

Promotions for a talent, giving exceptions to the working hours, quick or even double hiring may not be open to new ideas such as flexible working arrangements, and that to truly succeed and survive in this world, we need someone who would be on top of their game.

That is mainly because for HR to be a strategic partner, we need to have someone with a strategic mindset, good understanding of the business landscape, forward-looking vision, a heart for the people, as well as one who can do a little bit of everything. We need someone who would dare to make exceptions or even overthrow some HR processes, procedures and policies, simply because it is not working or is a roadblock to the rapid digital world.

A typical person who goes by the book may not be the best person to drive such a fast-moving, quick or even double promotions for a talent, giving exceptions to the working hours - policies reformed - simply because it’s against policies.

It’s important that this strategic HR leader is able to be visionary, anticipate future needs, proactive and not just reactive to current issues.

BUILDING A STRATEGIC HR THAT DRIVES THE BUSINESS

By ELISA DASS KAHAN
elisadasskahaneconomics.com

1. Assign a strategic HR leader
   The first step in breaking down the seemingly right thing – promoting or rewarding your current HR head to transform and grow his/her current team into a strategic division.
   After all, the current HR head would be the ideal candidate with the business, it would take him/her long to move HR in the new direction.
   What seems to be the easier and wont cost to do is to select the positive results we anticipate.

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   2. Surround the strategic leader with top and right

   Studies show that most top graduates do not choose HR as their first career option. My guess is that most still have the conventional view of HR being operational and boring, with no career progression.

   Therefore, when we have to transform an organisation, we need a HR leader to drive the business, not just help keep the engine running.

   The question is, how do we know when to look for the right top people, most in talent assessments and programmes, build a competency model and research some of the HR policies.

   All this is done with the view and expectations that existing and new talents will be better developed to contribute more back to the organisation, which will eventually increase the efficiency, profitability and image of the company.

   Take training for example. If we are honest with ourselves, how many times do we select a training programme based on cost?

   Is HRDF-claimable (Human Resource Development Fund)? Is it within the green zone?

   It is the HR leader’s duty then to first make the organisation financially, the new strategic HR leader needs to be able to see beyond this and identify premium development avenues or programmes that will truly benefit the top people in the organisation.

   Another point of importance is to protect the organisation financially, the new strategic HR leader needs to be able to see beyond this and identify premium development avenues or programmes that will truly benefit the top people in the organisation.

   To move forward as an organisation, we need to have someone with a strategic mindset, we need to have someone who would dare to make exceptions or even overthrow some HR processes, procedures and policies, simply because it is not working or is a roadblock to the rapid digital world.

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   3. Paradigm shifts for the organisation

   In the note he article in Forbes Steve Krashinsky said, “It begins by articulating the entire organisation to driving customer success as the principal goal of the organisation and putting in place the management principles and practices that enable staff to fulfill that goal.”

   “This means shifting the role of managers from controllers to enablers, coordinating work through dynamic linking rather than bureaucratic processes, a shift from economic value to value and a shift from top-down command to adult-adult conversations.”

   For this transformation to happen, a slightly longer form effort is required.

   To move forward as an organisation, we need a HR investment centre rather than a cost centre.

   If we are not ready to either implement change, we need to have someone that would be able to look at the organisation, he/she has just appointed himself/herself a group of co-owners to work in the same direction.

   CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

   It’s exciting. It’s tough. It’s for the long haul. But it’s rewarding.

   So, start linking up with key alliances in the industry to help you through this time of change and advancement of HR and your organisation.

   An article, “Why I Hate HR”, written a decade ago by Keith Hamilton in Fast Company claims that the HR professionals are not developing themselves fast enough to support the movement towards a world in which learning organisation to cater for the knowledge work environment.

   He states, “The human resource trade is a professional, as it is a business, a necessary evil – and at worst, a bad bureaucratic barrier that hardly ensures numerical rules, metrics constructs, and impede change.

   ‘Hit’ is the corporate function with the greatest potential – the top driver in the theory of business performance – and also the one that most profoundly underlies.”

   In the move towards being strategic, HR needs to instill in all leaders within the organisation the ability to think and train a successor for the strategic role goes well beyond a team role (or to risk a little).

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MALAYSIA'S 100 Leading Graduate Employers is the country's largest and longest-running study on graduate recruitment.

More than 14,000 respondents took part in the survey in 2014, signalling a growth in the number of students and fresh graduates who have contributed to determining the latest graduate recruitment trends via a comprehensive study held across Malaysian campuses.

Apart from selecting their preferred companies to work for upon graduation, the study also highlights the hot-button topics when it comes to hiring Gen-Y, for instance, their desired starting salary and working hours in a first job, as well as employer attractiveness factors such as working from home options along with training and development opportunities.

In 2012, the brand expanded to include the annual Malaysia's 100 Leading Graduate Employers Conference. This year, it will take place from Nov 6 to Nov 7.

This year's conference embraces the presence of Richard Mosley, author of the global best-seller The Employer Brand, as special keynote presenter. As executive vice-president of People in Business and global head of brand consulting for Employer Brand, he will be showcasing proven practices and tools to help organisations reach Superstar status.

Key benefits of attending Malaysia's 100 Leading Graduate Employers Conference include:

- Introducing proven practices and tools to HR functions.
- Preparing organisations to address people-centred issues more effectively.
- Recognising the new roles of HR to steer organisations toward profitability.
- Examining the factors that drive the need for innovation in recruitment and retention practices.
- Lowering high attrition rates by incorporating compelling changes in HR systems.
- Culminating in a prestigious gala awards dinner, graced by representatives from the country's most creative and effective graduate recruiters.

This year, 17 sector awards will be presented to deserving corporations, alongside the highly sought-after Graduate Employer of the Year accolades, at the awards night happening at Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur on Nov 7.

For more information, visit http://malaysia100.com/
Learning to Be ‘Teachable’

Career Advice from GTI Asia CEO Hee Kim Fah

By Hyma Pillay

Any great leaders start from scratch before reaching the top. Different paths, opportunities, life choices, starting from their very first job, have an impact on the journey to the top. We speak to Hee Kim Fah on his first job, and his journey to becoming group chief executive officer of GTI Asia.

Do tell us about your first job.

I started off as a computer engineer in an engineering company monitoring and evaluating projects. I was fortunate to be involved in the construction of the biggest power station in Malaysia at the time. I was responsible for installing a computer system to keep track and automate all the cables, both power and control cabling, laid or to be laid, in the power station.

How important do you think your first job has been to your career development and personal life?

As a fresh graduate then, being given a task to put into place a computer system was overwhelming. It was a mammoth task and extremely challenging. I learnt that if you put your mind into something, and be open to get help from experienced people, the seemingly mammoth task becomes achievable.

This has given me the confidence to face other challenging tasks in my career.

What are the important attributes and factors that have a bearing on a person’s career success?

The attributes and factors to a person’s success is determination, willingness to learn from others and understanding that giving up is not an option.

Earlier in my career, I looked up to most of the superiors who were assigned to me and tried to learn as much as I could from them. I mainly focused on their good traits and their strengths rather than their weaknesses – something important for every young worker to practise.

What is your wish for the young people?

I often tell my team, including my children, that there are two important elements that can help you make good progress in life. They are being learnable and teachable. If we are given the opportunity to learn from those who are better than us, we should continue learning. This includes going back to school to fill any knowledge gaps.

If people come to teach us, even if they are pointing out our mistakes in anger, we should be humble enough to listen and learn from them.

Personal Story

For Hee, the most memorable event in his career was when he was given the opportunity to promote a company and pioneer the Multimedia Super Corridor initiative in Malaysia at the young age of 34. He cherished the rigorous planning sessions with officers from the Prime Minister’s department and meeting the then Prime Minister Datuk Seri (now Tun) Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Words of Wisdom

“No task is too difficult or too easy. At the end of the day, deliver your best. To the young people who are embarking on their career journey, take on the tasks given to you and grab every opportunity that comes your way. If you don’t have opportunities, then ask for them!

“It is important to be patient in your careers and do your tasks well. Form good relationships with colleagues and superiors. Build a reputation that you can achieve anything under any given circumstance.”

Send us your feedback at editor@leaderonomics.com. Go to www.leaderonomics.com to read more My First Job articles.
THE LIFELINE IN MUSIC THERAPY

By LIM LAY HSUAN
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I

T would not be an exaggeration to say that music is a universal language that anyone can relate to. Music is also a powerful tool that breaks cultural and social barriers, as we can see from the worldwide craze over “Gangnam Style” in 2012. Realising the potential of music in reaching the hearts and minds of its listeners, let us explore music therapy and its career potential in Malaysia. Sherrene Teh, a registered music therapist, shares her experience.

PASSION AND EXPOSURE

Having enjoyed working in a reputable chemical company as a communications person for 1½ years after obtaining a Bachelor in Classical Music, Teh felt her heartstrings tugged to pursue her passion in music and healthcare.

“It took me another 1½ years to leave my job to pursue a master’s degree in music therapy. I spent two years at the University of Melbourne and completed my Master of Music Therapy there.

“During my time in Australia, I had the opportunity to do internships at a community centre and a psychiatry facility at The Alfred Hospital.

“I had a chance to work with a group of adolescents with eating disorders at the Monash Children’s Hospital. I also worked with at-risk students in a mainstream school in Melbourne,” says Teh.

THE NECESSARY PREPARATION

Music therapy is the intentional use of music in medical, educational and everyday environments to improve, maintain or optimise one’s health and wellbeing.

“I came across the term ‘music therapy’ during my degree. I was excited, as it was a new possibility to venture into – other than being a music teacher or a performer.

“I started exploring my interest by working with people with disabilities. I volunteered in Malaysian Care to see if I had the patience and empathy, and guess what – I loved it! Also, during my working years, I took a diploma in public relations,” enthuses the bubbly Teh.

“Oh course I had my concerns as a musician wanting to become a music therapist since it’s a relatively new career path in Malaysia. But, having supportive parents and trust in God made it easier to take this leap of faith.”

When asked why she came back to Malaysia instead of continuing her service in Australia, Teh elaborates, “Malaysia is my home. This is where I grew up, surrounded with culture I’m most familiar with.

“I always tell people that being a Malaysian puts me in the most strategic position. I know songs in different languages, I can converse in various languages, and I know the dos and don’ts of our cultures. Also, people with disabilities in Malaysia deserve better!”

A SELFSERVICE

“Music therapists are trained to assess clients, design a treatment plan and evaluate if the treatment found effective or not. That summarises what I do, really.

“The first meet-up is usually getting to know the child – his or her likes, dislikes, preferred instruments, physical abilities, communication skills, musical skills, sensory, level of understanding, cognitive skills, social and emotional abilities.

“From there, I’ll design a treatment plan to help develop the areas that the child finds challenging, using music as the vehicle to achieve that. The assessment and evaluation runs concurrently to ensure that every session benefits the child.

“I make house calls, often travelling on the busy roads of Kuala Lumpur to make music with my clients,” explains Teh when asked about her job scope as a music therapist.

THE ARDUOUS BUT FULFILLING JOURNEY

“Although my journey as a music therapist has seen its fair share of challenges, it has been wonderful so far. When I first started, many people advised that it will take time for my career to take off, but that’s not entirely true! The fact is there is a huge demand for music therapists, but we don’t have enough of them in Malaysia to meet those demands.

“I hold on to my No. 1 principle as a therapist – which is to see the abilities and not the disabilities. This helps me see the strength in the child and what they are able to do. From there, I use that ability to work on the areas they find challenging.

“The response from parents to music therapy has been very encouraging. What’s vital is constant communication between the therapist and parents.

“I try to create awareness among parents about music therapy and share with them why I do what I do. By them observing a session, they understand more about my work,” says Teh.

FINDING PURPOSE IN MUSIC

“I strive to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children in every therapy session. Having supportive parents who believe in what I’m doing for their children is what keeps me going.”

“I work with a family-centred approach whereby I invite parents to be part of the music therapy experience. This allows them to take back what they’ve observed during the session and practise it with their children at home.”

“What I enjoy the most about my work is the opportunity to touch young lives and families through music. In Yohan’s case, for example, it was such a joy to help this young boy with severe cerebral palsy discover his voice.”

“This was a boy who couldn’t speak, with limbs all curled up when I first saw him. After 36 music therapy sessions, his mum reported that Yohan has been responding well to questions and instructions.

“He is now motivated to join in conversations at the dinner table, even singing before he goes to bed,” recalls Teh about one of her most memorable moments as a music therapist.

Teh is currently involved with Project Tune Your Mood™, an innovative project created by Dr Carmen Cheong-Clinch in Australia to engage young people and youth through music. Teh is pioneering this collaborative project in Malaysia.

PARTING ADVICE

According to Teh, those who aspire to become a music therapist need to possess a high sense of empathy and compassion towards people, not sympathy or pity.

“It is not a glamorous job like a musician entertaining an audience on stage. In contrast, the work of a music therapist is not a very widely known one, as many of its work goes unseen by the masses.

Nonetheless, this noble job greatly impacts and inspires people in its behind-the-scenes work.

Editor’s note: Having first heard of music therapy about 10 years ago, it’s great to hear it here. Rock on Sherrene!

If you would like to know more about Sherrene’s work, or if you know anyone with interesting and unique jobs, drop us a line at editor@leaderonomics.com. We would love to hear from you! For more interesting articles, visit us at www.leaderonomics.com.
THE ‘PEOPLE VS STRATEGY’ DISCONNECTION

By JOHN WALTER BAYBAY
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OW is that time of the year when companies are going back to the drawing boards for strategic planning. C-level executives are busy these coming days, retreating into their war-rooms with their reports and scavenging for figures from last year, only to realise that much of their strategies have failed. What is it about strategic planning that we tend to get wrong? The practice of strategic development is as old as civilisation itself. The earliest evidence has been seen etched on the walls of Egypt as early as 1303 BC when Ramses II immortalised his conquest of lower Egypt.

Sun Tzu came out with many of his treatise regarding the Art of War back in 772-481 BC, and Machiavelli wrote The Prince supposedly around 1513. There has been much strategy and conquest since those times. Michael Porter wrote the bible of corporate strategy in Competitive Advantage, while W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne wrote “Value Innovation” in what was later popularised as Blue Ocean Strategy in 2005.

What is it about strategic planning that we tend to get wrong? The problem with strategy is really not about the strategy itself but rather its failure in “execution”. “Execution” is the item for reining and the fact that many C-suite executives are scrambling at this point is due to the fact that they have failed in many aspects. In a research conducted by The Economist, they found that around 80% of C-suite executives are cognisant of their roles in developing strategy and building execution.

However, the same research also reveals that only around 56% of strategic initiatives have been successfully implemented. What are the reasons for this disconnect? The solution seems to be rooted in people’s perception of what strategy is.

1. STRATEGY IS A STATEMENT
   It is that set of VMOGs (Vision, Mission, Objectives, Goals) written on a big plaque just as you enter the office.
   Everyone has these statements memo- nised but not everyone knows what they mean when he/she gets to their respective cubicles!

2. STRATEGY IS AN EVENT
   For C-suite executives, this is when all the numbers are reviewed and you are expected to give an excuse as to “why” things went wrong and present “how” you plan to get somewhere next year.
   You will use a number of strategic development frameworks. You defend your numbers and after everything is done, you say, “Phew! I’m glad I got away with that without losing my job!”

3. STRATEGY IS AN ACTION
   In this best scenario, everyone knows and acts according to where the ship is meant to sail. They have a clear understanding of its direction and how to get there.
   Strategy permeates every single task that they do and they are aware of their contribution to it.

STRATEGIC CASCADEING
I have spent many years working with executives in developing their corporate strategies. Much of the challenge I encounter is in cascading strategy into actionable initiatives and results.

The journey towards creating a strategy cannot be confined in boardrooms and planning frameworks.

What is often lacking is a clear transition between what is conceptual or abstract into something that everyone can grasp and translate into action in their daily working lives.

For the most part, strategies tend to be cascaded from the top-down.

I developed an illustration to explain this cascade (see Figure 1):

1. In the best cases of a typical “top-down” scenario, there is smooth transition between the strategic and tactical domains and everyone knows what to do.
2. They have a clear understanding and commitment to their contribution to the overall strategy.

In an alternate approach, strategic development could also be driven from an inverted pyramid where people down the line are recruited to develop top-level strategies.

In this way, strategic planning turns into a democratised process that ensures collaboration at every stage – from development to execution planning. The process tends to be inductive rather than deductive.

By engaging people who primarily work within the operational domain, strategy is better understood to include the strategic and the operational perspectives.

Cross-functional collaboration also ensures that strategy is understood down the line by making sure that everyone is looking at the same thing.

Everyone knows where he or she is amidst competition, where he/she needs to be, what he/she needs to do and how to get there.

STRATEGIC PARTNER
The key to jumping the execution hurdle is never going to be about answering the “whats”, “wheres” and the “hows”, but rather the “whos”.

The most often overlooked partner to strategic effectiveness within the organisation is usually the human resources (HR) department.

Organisations have a wellspring of talent who can move up from the tactical domains to the strategic domains. There is huge catchment of talent waiting to be developed.

HR could also facilitate and create the processes for inclusion and collaboration between levels to develop and execute an effective strategy.

Perhaps the “people championing” role has relegated HR into a supportive rather than a hard strategic role over the years, but that needs to change to deliver the numbers.

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. Get in touch with him at editor@leaderonomics.com. You can read more articles by him at www.leaderonomics.com

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DIODE CAMPS

Hello November! It’s the holiday month! Thinking of where to go and build long lasting friendships? Looking into doing something that would enhance your leadership skills? Worry no more because we’ve got DIODE Camps for you!

DIODE Camps are designed to help youth aged 12–19 build the foundations of leadership and allow youth to explore their skills and talents in a safe environment through experiential learning sessions.

Sign up for the DIODE Camps http://leaderonomics.org/youth or e-mail us at diode@leaderonomics.com to find out more! Hurry! Camp seats are limited!

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THE ‘PEOPLE VS STRATEGY’ DISCONNECTION

STRATEGISING FOR EFFECTIVE EXECUTION

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[Figure 1]
By HYMA PILLAY
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Over the past two years, there has been much discussion on the millennials, also known as Generation Y (Gen-Y). Every week we read or hear of new studies, articles and talks on Gen-Y – so much focus has been given to this generation. A recent research, by marketing blog, Marketo, suggests that the reign of the millennials may be coming to an end.

There is a new generation on the rise. I introduce you to Generation Z (Gen-Z). Born between 1996 and 2012, Gen-Z grew up in a time of uncertainty, a post-9/11 world, economic recessions, increased racial diversities, and reversed gender roles. Gen-Zs are more mature, self-directed and resourceful. Here are some interesting points that came out from Marketo’s research on Gen-Z:

1. Gen-Zs Are Adept Researchers
76% watch lessons online.
33% read textbooks on tablets.
20% work with classmates online.

2. Gen-Zs Are Driven Workers
76% of high school students believe they are more driven than their peers.
80% of high school students think they will turn into full-time jobs.
72% of high school students want to start their own business someday.

3. Gen-Zs Are Do-Goooders
60% of 16 to 19-year-olds currently volunteer.
76% are concerned about humanity’s impact on the planet.
20% believe they are more impactful than their peers.

Although it may be easy to assume that Gen-Zs seem too engroiled in entertainment and the world of social media, research and studies have shown that this group is getting larger and more influential. This is evident in recent news all around the world of teenagers standing up and fighting for what they believe in, inventing devices, machines, and coming up with new ideas as solutions to fix the problems they see. This is a generation of hope. It is time to leverage on the potential it has to offer and help it achieve what it can, by providing platforms for it to make a difference.

“The youth is the hope of our future.” – Jose Rizal

Hyma Pillay is operations leader for the Leaderonomics editorial team. She has a soft spot for children and youth, and is passionate about developing and bringing out the best in them to help them become great leaders in their communities. You can email her at hyma.pillay@leaderonomics.com. For more articles by Hyma, visit www.leaderonomics.com

THE LEAD CHALLENGE

SPARK aims to help participants develop their attitude, self-awareness, critical and creative thinking, communication, and confidence through the LEAD Challenge. The participants will be divided into teams, with each team allocated a sum of cash to design, develop, and execute a live community project for the duration of the programme.

This challenge is specially designed to ensure that participants can quickly apply the skills they have learnt throughout the programme, and are able to integrate these skills and principles into their personal leadership journey.

PITCH TO WIN

This year, the ECM Libra Foundation is offering five winners a “Leadership Ticket” to attend SPARK Leadership Programme, held at Epsom College from Dec 14 to Dec 23.

Contestants are to give an “Elevator Pitch” (three minutes presentation) to a panel of judges, answering the following question: “Name one problem your school/community is facing. In your opinion, what is the one thing you can do to help fix this?”

The SPARK audition will be held on Nov 22, 2014, 9am to 5pm, at the Leaderonomics office.

Details will be sent via email once your registration is confirmed.

To stand a chance to win, simply go to http://leaderonomics.org/reg/spark2014/

To register for the SPARK Audition, download, fill out, scan and return the application form to spark@leaderonomics.com.