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THE NEW IRREPRESSIBLE YOU

WHILE my intention was to begin our first pullout of 2015 on a high note, I must take a moment to remember and keep in prayer everyone who has been affected by recent events: the floods ravaging our country, and the tragic AirAsia flight.

The spirit of giving of Malaysians has been evident by the outpouring of support and more vividly, the mountains of rice and other essentials in the foyer of this office.

In the same vein, John Baybay reflects on 2014 and offers advice on how we can get the best out of the worst. Whether from your own childhood, or through your young ones, many have met the characters of Pooh – Tigger and Eeyore. Wouldn’t it be grand if all of us had jobs that had us bounding to work with all the vigour to accomplish anything, and other essentials in the foyer of this office.

For those still dragging their Eeyore feet, Prema Jayabalans zooms in on back to work blues – and how one might ease back into work after a long break. Adeline Tay delves a little deeper into what we might consider doing to ensure that every day at the office is like our first day – full of hope and nervous excitement!

In a reflective mood, Vinesh Naidu turns to what motivates and grounds us, and shares a short story of how Gandhi remained true to himself, and inspired even his cynics. In Be a Leader, we talk about what we might consider doing to ensure that every day at the office is like our first day – full of hope and nervous excitement!

New beginnings are perhaps more clearly delineated for young people still studying – and with the recent announcement that the new school year will be delayed, we feature a safe and inspiring place for local teenagers to spend their free time while developing their leadership potential.

To that great smouldering mass of Gen-Y all over the world, our past (and certainly missed) leader Lily Cheah penned a letter – an honest assessment of Gen-Y today, and her hopes for the future.

Finally, because Roshan rightly said that regular reflection is important, we feature two more leaders as they look back, and look ahead to 2015. And finally (really) our editorial team takes some space to also share our innermost thoughts and wishes for a great year ahead.

Have a fantastic weekend!

KAREN NEOH
Editor
leaderonomics.com

THE SOUR FRUIT

“What the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat.” – excerpt from Lemon Tree song by Peter, Paul & Mary

It’s true, a lemon eaten on its own is very sour. It puckers your mouth and makes you wince. Lemons, however, are frequently used as an accompaniment to other ingredients to add flavour to many sweet deserts and savoury dishes.

With these, we have lemon chicken, lemon cheesecake, lemon meringue pie and lemon juice as salad dressing.

If you are still “saw” of certain things that didn’t pan out well at work last year, don’t dwell on it any longer. In this new year of new beginnings, make it a point to work out any differences that exist and collaborate with others to achieve the impossible as a team in your organisation.

ZEST VS PITH

Lemon zest is the yellow portion of the peel. It is valued for the strong citrus flavour it imparts to food when cooking or baking, thanks to an abundance of aromatic oils in the rind.

Beneath the zest is the pith, the white part of the peel, which is bitter and unpleasant to taste. Wherever you see recipes using lemon zest, peel or rind, you would try to avoid the pith altogether.

To separate lemon zest and pith, you need zestng tools such as paring knife, vegetable peeler, grater or zester. If lemons could talk, I assure you that they would be crying, screaming and writhing in pain.

Similarly, focus on the “zest” of life and remove the “pith” of bitterness. The process of grating and zestng would definitely be a painful one for most of us, but as the famous adage reminds us, “no pain, no gain.” At the end of our learning process, what matters most is that we know that these pain points produce perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope. And with hope, we can better overcome the stumbling blocks in front of us.

TUNE IN

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

01 “Part of the process of beginning anew, or changing directions is to know where you want to go. I know this sounds simplistic and easy, but this is one of the most difficult of choices to make with clarity.” – Byron Pulfor

02 “Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.” – Carl Bard

03 “You can learn new things at any time in your life if you’re willing to be a beginner. You can actually learn to like being a beginner, the whole world opens up to you.” – Barbara Sher

04 “Every day is a new beginning. Treat it that way. Stay away from what might have been, and look at what can be.” – Marsha Petrie Sue

05 “Fear not that thy life shall come to an end, but rather fear that it shall never have a beginning.” – John Henry Newman

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TREE OF GOLD

Lemon tree, in its fullness of ripen fruits, is a sight to behold. From a distance, the fruits look like nuggets of gold growing from the tree.

It’s a reminder that all of us, like the individual fruit, is a part of something bigger than our own.

Where do you think the fruits get their daily dosage of nutrients and minerals if not from the plant’s vascular system, with its roots absorbing minerals and water before being transported to the shoots to allow plant growth?

What is your purpose in life? What motivates you at work?

Are you driven by your own selfish goals or are you giving your all to leave an impact in others? I hope it is the latter.

IN CONCLUSION

For a start, be bright as yellow like the chewy lemon candy, believe that the days ahead will be better (although not necessarily easier), and don’t give up.
SAME, SAME BUT AMAZING
CAN EVERY DAY AT WORK BE LIKE YOUR FIRST?

BY KAREN NEOH
karen.neoh@leaderonomics.com

ERE we are! For some, the new year revelry may still be going strong, but let’s face it. We are firmly and happily in 2015! After the grim challenges that our nation and countless others have endured in 2014, many people have really been looking forward to a new year and a new beginning. Each of us may have a different outlook for 2015 as day one, back to work, looms perilously close. In my years of work, I have held three jobs where I was raring to return to work every Monday morning. Interestingly, each of those jobs was for a social enterprise, or a non-governmental organisation running social enterprises.

So here are the findings of the social experiment that has run for almost two decades, with a subject of one (the writer) but with the benefits of thousands of interactions with friends, family and foe throughout. My econometrics professor might frown on the statistical significance, but rest assured, the following points are also based on copious readings on the topic.

How every day at work can be like your first!

1 KNOWING WHAT MATTERS
We often hear advice that our choice of job should be with an organisation with a mission that mirrors our own personal goals. Equally, we hear naysayers quip that this is somewhat impossible. I do believe that there is a good match between individual and organisation somewhere out there, and that we should all strive to find it for a win-win outcome.

In reality, things may get in the way, and with the call for flexibility in organisations to adapt to changing environments, even the dream job you celebrated with glee may change over time.

Having said all that, I believe we should all be aware of our strengths and abilities, and our non-negotiables with regard to the place we work. And to act when we realise that the balance is off.

2 THAT SPRING IN YOUR STEP!
Everything has fallen in place! You have found your dream job. But even as you skip along to work Monday morning, negative thoughts creep in, chipping away at your effervescence (Yes! Bubbly like that vitamin C), “Who said what about my project? Why didn’t we get funds to expand that great initiative?”
In times like these, I admit I struggle to keep the negativity at bay.
I then remind myself that if the organisation is still on track with the mission I believe in, then decisions have been made possibly with information unknown to me.
In my past life of using health economics to help inform decisions at the national health system level, it was clear that making the right decision based on the right evidence was still difficult when many stakeholders with varying needs were involved.
Knowing that your company is still navigating its way to achieve what you believe in does wonders! (Go to point 4 for more step-springing hints!)

3 SKILLS, NOT HEART ALONE
Passion, perseverance and the power to inspire others – the value of which even the best economists would struggle to quantify (and yet immediately we all think of Bhutan’s famed Gross National Happiness Index).
While critical, both you and your organisation need to look beyond the passion you have for work and invest in developing your technical skills.
Whenever I am faced with an eager sales assistant with no clue of what he/she is trying to sell, I silently rage against the manager who allowed that situation to be.
On a related note, if you find yourself falling asleep thinking about work and waking up still thinking about work (I have done this), you may have wandered off track with a job that is likely overwhelming your ability to lead a healthy life (Go back to point 1 and assess your balance!).

4 FRIENDS
For the longest time, people have told me that it is impossible to find friends at work. Even my dearly departed father.
He was not one to play politics, and so inevitably, suffered from others doing just that.
But when he announced his retirement, everyone came out of the woodworks – from all levels of the organisation – to wish him well.
Today I realise how significant those actions and words were – because by then, none of them stood to gain from it.
And Pa, I am afraid you did have many friends at work as many of them paid their last respects to you more than 10 years after you retired. So! It is possible to make real friends at work!
And if we, like others, have found work that is meaningful to us, how can we not find friends among those sharing similar goals and values?
I am inherently shy and find making new friends sometimes pretty nerve-wracking, but I do have great friends from each job I have held. It certainly helps maintain that spring in your step, knowing you have people who are marching along the same path.

5 WITHOUT JOB?
Finally, a word from our sponsors. And with that, I mean the many people who play a role in moulding who we are and supporting us in finding and keeping that dream job.
This is a career guide – so naturally we focus on the many topics related to being employed, finding fulfilling careers as well as finding the right people to work with. I would like to recognise the people who are sometimes considered to be in the periphery, but who really are the centre of our lives.
The people who raised, educated, mentored, inspired, and cared for us – the same ones who will be there years after we hand in our parking tags, lose access to our email accounts (which we pore over hours and hours every day), and pack the goofy knick-knacks our desks have accumulated (if you take heed of point 4, the goofy knick-knack box could really be a BIG one!).

Do think about your entourage, and if it so moves you, run up and give them a hug of appreciation as we skipping into 2015!
A LICE is back home after a three-week vacation. As the communications manager for a leading automobile company, one would think that she would be busy picking out her office wear for the next day, raring to head back to work.

In reality, however, Alice feels even more lethargic than ever and is dreading work. The mere thought of going through her inbox, probably filled with hundreds of messages, makes her want to jump into a plane and go on another vacation. Alice may be going through the back-to-work blues.

How many of us experience this after a long holiday? Before taking a much-needed break, we say that we will come back to work fit, re-energised and ready to take on a whole new load of tasks.

But, as soon as the plane touches down, we cringe in dismay at the notion of going back to the office. All the enthusiasm of tackling work with vigour has flown out the window. How will we cope with our return to work, and how quickly the benefits of holidays ‘fade out’, could be linked to what we did with our time off.

By PREMA JAYABALAN
prema.jayabalang@leaderonomics.com

Mystarjob.com, Saturday 3 January 2015

WHAT WORK, AND HOW LINKED TO WHAT HOLIDAYS 'FADE OUT', COULD BE HOW WE COPE WITH OUR RETURN TO WORK, AND HOW QUICKLY THE BENEFITS OF HOLIDAYS ‘FADE OUT’, COULD BE LINKED TO WHAT WE DID WITH OUR TIME OFF

FACING THE BLUES
According to Barbara Griffin, a senior lecturer at Macquarie University, these blues are linked to sadness that the entertaining activities are about to end as well as changes in food and sleeping patterns during vacations.

"How we cope with our return to work, and how quickly the benefits of holidays 'fade out', could be linked to what we did with our time off.

"In the short-term, the effect of holidays does tend to wear off after three weeks to a month. The fade-out effects are quicker if we face a lot of work when we get back," she says. "So how do we bounce back to work without feeling fatigued?"

HELPFUL TIPS
Here are a few steps that you can adopt to ease yourself back to your work routine.

1. Communicate before going back to work.
   You may have taken a long holiday and might have lost touch with the happenings in the office. Once you are back from your getaway, call up your colleagues to get a heads-up on the latest at work.
   Update yourself with recent work-related matters to ensure that you are not lost and unaware of current projects and dealings at the office.

2. Prepare yourself well.
   Once back, don’t jump straight into work. Make sure you have taken a day off to rejuvenate yourself from your holiday.
   Use this day to rest well and update your top priority tasks and goals lists.
   Once you are clear of what you need to accomplish, you can step right into business with a clear mind.

3. Take on new assignments
   For some, a long absence from work can dampen their zeal to take on challenges and to be innovative and creative.
   To get into that cycle again, take on a new project as soon as you are back. Having something new to do will get your brain working.
   Your relaxed and rejuvenated mind will be able to churn out ideas that will increase productivity, whilst steering you towards getting immersed into your working mode.

4. Touch base with clients
   So, it’s your first day back at work. Don’t tackle a stack of paperwork or attempt to clear about 600 emails.
   That is going to drain you and make you wish you never came back.
   Use this day to meet up with clients for lunch or tea.
   Get enlightened on the happenings on their end, ask of their well-being and share your holiday stories with them.
   By leveraging on this human factor, you will enjoy being back at work.
   These conversations might even produce significant business venture ideas and thoughts that will increase productivity in your ongoing job role.

IN SUMMARY
Taking a good holiday to bring that spark back into your life is good.
However, it is also important to have that same zest when you come back to work after a much-needed break.
Coming back with positivity and enthusiasm is a boost towards dynamic developments in one’s career.

Prema enjoys going on vacations, at least once a year because she believes that the cool, relaxed setting and the experience gained will help her in reassessing herself and setting new goals. If you have a story to share, write to her at prema.jayabalang@leaderonomics.com. For more insights, visit www.leaderonomics.com

DO you remember the last time you went on a holiday? If you answered no, then it’s high time you took one.
A month, a week or even a weekend spent away from your daily routine can work wonders for you and here is how it works...

DECREASES STRESS AND INCREASES PRODUCTIVITY
On a vacation, you are far away from your daily routine and your mind can roam freely, enabling you to think about things that have been at the back of your mind for a long time.
It’s time to spring clean the mind by removing excessive, unnecessary things and giving room for bright, new thoughts. This can reduce stress and increase productivity.
You are free to let your thoughts flow and these moments are the ones that have been known to generate creative and productive ideas.

GIVES YOU A FRESH OUTLOOK
Being in a new surrounding can help create a new perspective for your brain of thoughts.
A rejuvenated mind comes up with new ideas and at times, that may help settle an important issue you have been tackling, from a different angle.
This new perspective may be something valuable that can be practised in your daily routine for a better life as well.

KEEPS YOU HEALTHY AND HAPPY
A study conducted by the Department of Psychology in the State University of New York, Oswego, United States on 3,000 middle-aged men at risk for heart disease, showed that those who skipped vacations for five consecutive years were found to be 30% more likely to suffer heart attacks than those who took at least one week off each year.
Meanwhile, the Framingham Heart Study found that women who took a vacation once every six years or less were almost eight times more likely to develop coronary heart disease than those who took at least two vacations a year.
So, my friends, you should get on the move to book your next vacation!

BACK-TO-WORK BLUES
WAYS TO SPRINGBOARD INTO ACTION

HOW TO?

1. Take a Break
2. Decrease stress and increase productivity
3. Gives you a fresh outlook
4. Keeps you healthy and happy

WORK, AND HOW LINKED TO WHAT HOLIDAYS ‘FADE OUT’, COULD BE HOW WE COPE WITH OUR RETURN TO WORK, AND HOW QUICKLY THE BENEFITS OF HOLIDAYS ‘FADE OUT’, COULD BE LINKED TO WHAT WE DID WITH OUR TIME OFF
The year 2014 has been marked with some of the worst disasters we have seen in the region. Indeed, we do not even have to look very far to witness the tragedies befalling Malaysia Airlines flights MH17 and MH170 (and the recent AirAsia Indonesia flight QZ8501). These were disasters likened to lightning striking twice in the same place within the same year. These unfortunate occurrences do prove that the worst things can happen not only once, but twice! Lives were lost, families were affected and eventually businesses and everyone are affected.

IN THE NEWS
On a lighter note, the year also brought about the shocking news that Hello Kitty is not actually a cat, despite being a “Kitty”. The news had two generations of people who always thought Hello Kitty to be everyone’s lovable pet aghast.

In more recent news, Instagram’s Bot Purg resulted in Justin Bieber losing 3.5 million followers! It seems like he had a population of followers who were not actually real people. I could not help but crack a smirk at this bit of news just to find that Kim Kardashian is perhaps coming to a stark realisation that perhaps taking things worse than others; only to find that Kim Kardashian is a part of us and occupies most of our waking day. The same strategies and metrics that apply in the workplace can be carried over to your personal life.

THE 3FS
In a previous failure, I forced myself to recount what mattered most and came up with three things: faith, family, and friends. With constant undulations that life brings, it is good to look at these three things as a constant with maturity begging for more discernment as time goes by. Last year has been an exceptional teacher in this regard. In the backdrop of your personal life lies the usual business of the day, but this does not mean that you have to leave everything you learnt at work once you leave the office. Whether we like it or not, work is a part of us and occupies most of our waking day.

All of which should be a lesson for all of us. We need to take the good along with the bad as many would say, but how does this affect your life for the better? Personally, this writer has seen better years. Out of some of the debacles, came some of the best learning moments in my life. What could be a loss in the more obvious front such as career and money could be one of the greatest wins in the game of life.

LIFE MANAGEMENT
Life needs to be managed just as anything that occupies your time. With some of the wows in life, come some of the greatest gains in learning. Here are four ways on my list.

1. Focus on what matters
While saying “money isn’t everything” could be considered a cliche, much of it rings true especially when the chips are down. As said earlier, faith, family, and friends tend to bring back disproportionate rates of returns when considering what you get back in exchange for the time invested.

Keeping an eye on the three also helps us manage the paradoxes of earning and the quality of life. Back in 2012, I racked in the most billable hours in my consulting career only to fail the stress test on my annual physical exam. Top that with not being mental and emotionally present during the most important moments in my family’s life.

A year lost in connecting with your loved ones cannot be replaced with money, especially with those who have passed on. We spend so much money on material things rather than spend time with people.

In the end, you may have a fat account (and fat around your waist), and still be emotionally and spiritually bankrupt. When a downturn occurred the following year, I found faith, family, and friends with me throughout my trials. They helped me get back on my feet, encouraged me, and even helped me venture towards things that I love to do. I am doing them right now as I write this article.

2. Let go of heavy baggage
You will find that things and people are not necessary to take on your journey. I have found that some of the people who pat me on the back during my career highs were the same ones who were stabbing it when I was weak.

In the end, you will realise that we spend too much time with people who are only with you due to strategic interest. Some were with you because of your material generosity and your image. You will find that once they get what they want in one way or another (which sometimes does not include you), they are fast to step on you to advance themselves. They disguise their advice under a veneer of honesty and sometimes with twisted principles.

In the end, they are full of negativity, and unmet needs you cannot fill.

Know the signs early, accept the brutal facts, forgive them, and move on.

3. Find what ignites your passion
Another life paradox is finding what you truly love during the worst moments of your life. When things take a downturn, you will suddenly reconnect with your forgotten talents.

They were hidden all along! Some of them could be a bit detached from what you do for money.

What you realise then is that having a job could be different from making a living.

Try to use this time to realign your career and priorities. Try to identify things that you would be doing anyway, with or without the money.

Get in touch with your God-given talents and strengths, and combine them with your zealous passion. You will find that the amount of effort will yield exponential returns.

4. Multiply yourself: Connect and collaborate with others
Share your passion and invest in fruitful relationships that develop your interests and open new perspectives to create new possibilities.

Commit to a positive change beyond yourself and beyond your shores. Be accountable to the people around you. Take the lead if you must, but lead responsibly.

IN CONCLUSION
Many great things could come out from the worst. It is a matter of perspective, but in everything you do, always remember to be authentic.

Always keep your faith, family, and friends. Keep your eyes on the horizon and your feet on the ground. Live simply but love extravagantly!
INVESTING IN LEADERS OF TOMORROW
A SAFE AND INSPIRING SPACE FOR YOUTH

BY KAREN NEOH
karen.neoh@leaderonomics.com

In the first few weeks of 2015, the DropZone youth will be joining in the 2015 green campaign to identify more youth to get involved to build a ‘greener’ world. DropZone will initiate special programmes, such as 1pm to 5pm weekdays. Our first activity of the year will be held on the 5th of January, our traditional New Year’s Day.

In the process, we have learnt a great deal about ourselves and important lessons and articles that bring value to our readers.

Our first activity of the year will be held on the 5th of January, our traditional New Year’s Day. Our purpose is to encourage the youth to get involved and contribute to the community around them.

In 300 words or less (we’re pretty strict here), we hope to instill in our youth a positive outlook and a desire to contribute to society. We believe that the youth of today will be the leaders of tomorrow, and it is our responsibility to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed.

In this article, we will be sharing some of the lessons we have learnt in the past year and how we plan to improve ourselves in the coming year. We hope that our readers will find these lessons useful and inspiring.

THE DESERT ROAD
In the first few weeks of 2015, the DropZone youth will be joining in the 2015 green campaign to identify more youth to get involved to build a ‘greener’ world. DropZone will initiate special programmes, such as 1pm to 5pm weekdays. Our first activity of the year will be held on the 5th of January, our traditional New Year’s Day.

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O NCE upon a time, people believed that brain development stops at a certain stage before it starts deteriorating. People also believed that one cannot “teach an old dog new tricks”.

Fortunately, with the discovery of the plasticity of the human brain in neuroscience, we now know that a person’s brain is constantly changing through the exposure to new experiences and stimuli.

This is great news indeed, especially for senior citizens. Since our cognitive functions can be developed, many researchers have conducted studies to investigate how certain activities or games can be used as tools to give our brains a boost.

Following this, there has been a noticeable increase in the hype for brain-training games, and this is what we will be looking at today.

**BRAND-TRAINING GAMES**

By ADELINE TAY
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In view of the hype (and profit) that the brain-training industry has generated, many companies jumped on the bandwagon and use the term “brain training” to try and sell programmes that have not been proven to work and that have no benefits for the brain. With yearly subscriptions of up to US$120, organisations from the brain-training industry claim to develop brain games that promise to improve memory, processing speed, problem-solving, and even, in some cases, the ability to avert or delay Alzheimer’s disease.

With the attention that the brain-training industry is getting from making such claims, the Stanford Center on Longevity and the Berlin Max Planck Institute for Human Development gathered a group of nearly 70 researchers, comprising many of the world’s leading cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists, to address some of the claims made.

**BRAND-TRAINING INDUSTRY: THE FALL**

Many brain-training companies typically describe their games as “based on neuroscience,” “backed by solid scientific research”, or “proven to work” to attract consumers.

More likely than not, if you scratch the surface and dig deeper, there is no real scientific evidence to back these claims.

It has been found that such cited research are often loosely interpreted and whose results are overgeneralised to fit the “scientific claims” of the company, and to the games they sell.

Scientific studies should be independent, repeatable, and presented officially in scientific peer-reviewed journals.

What happens is that in most brain-training studies, researchers usually measure improvement in cognitive skills such as memory based on a single independent task, rather than a range of tasks that represent a broad ability.

A clear line needs to be drawn between improvements on a particular task and improvements in general cognitive ability – both of which suggest two very different things. This is the part where most people are being misled.

Many brain-training companies blur the lines between these two distinctions, and generalise the findings of such research towards their flavour.

Regardless of whether such results were misinterpreted or exaggerated as part of the marketing strategy, many consumers are led to believe that improving on a specific game will positively impact their cognitive abilities and capability in life.

Therefore, please take note that the consensus among neuroscientific and cognitive researchers is that this is not so.

**CONCLUSION**

While brain-training games are fun and engaging, there is insufficient scientific evidence at this point in time to indicate that they significantly improve one’s memory, intelligence, problem solving, or other higher-order cognitive abilities.

What the researchers did find is that people who play brain-training games do get better at those games, i.e. the more you play the game, the better you’ll get at it.

However, this is pretty much not a surprise as this only proves the old saying of “practice makes perfect”.

Hearing said that, if you love playing these brain games, I’m not suggesting you to stop. I’m merely informing you not to expect too much from it, aside from being able to “travel into an alternate dimension” where you are the protagonist of that world, or “speed up time” as you realised that a few hours have passed before you know it.

To end on a happier note, check out some tips (see column to the right), supported and validated by numerous scientific research studies, on how you can increase your cognitive performance!

**PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT TIPS FOR THE BRAIN**

1. **ELIMINATE MULTITASKING**

| Based on research, our brain can only do one thing at a time. When we constantly shift attention from one activity to another (including entertaining every Facebook or WhatsApp alert from our smartphones), we are actually making it harder for our brains to focus.

| While multitasking may make us feel more efficient, it actually overloads the brain, making it less efficient, not to mention causing an increase in stress levels.

2. **UNPLUG!**

| In today’s society where technology has been integrated into every aspect of our daily life, studies have shown that temporarily unplugging oneself from technology – even for just 30 minutes daily – can improve brain health.

| A number of studies have concluded that overuse of smartphones, tablets and other electronics can jeopardise our ability to process information deeply.

| So instead of moving from screen to screen, app to app and responding to every WhatsApp alert, learn to turn off your phone and find a quiet place to complete a task.

3. **EXERCISE!**

| Time and time again, researchers have reported that physical exercise helps your brain to stay sharp.

| Physical exercise increases oxygen to your brain, reduces the risk for disorders that lead to memory loss, and has shown to have positive benefits for the hippocampus (i.e. a brain structure that is important for learning and memory).

| According to a study conducted by the Department of Exercise Science at the University of Georgia, even brief exercising for 20 minutes facilitates information processing and memory functions.

In view of the hype (and profit) that the brain-training industry has generated, many companies jumped on the bandwagon and use the term “brain training” to try and sell programmes that have not been proven to work and that have no benefits for the brain. With yearly subscriptions of up to US$120, organisations from the brain-training industry claim to develop brain games that promise to improve memory, processing speed, problem-solving, and even, in some cases, the ability to avert or delay Alzheimer’s disease. With the attention that the brain-training industry is getting from making such claims, the Stanford Center on Longevity and the Berlin Max Planck Institute for Human Development gathered a group of nearly 70 researchers, comprising many of the world’s leading cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists, to address some of the claims made.

**BRAND-TRAINING INDUSTRY: THE FALL**

Many brain-training companies typically describe their games as “based on neuroscience,” “backed by solid scientific research”, or “proven to work” to attract consumers.

More likely than not, if you scratch the surface and dig deeper, there is no real scientific evidence to back these claims. It has been found that such cited research are often loosely interpreted and whose results are overgeneralised to fit the “scientific claims” of the company, and to the games they sell. Scientific studies should be independent, repeatable, and presented officially in scientific peer-reviewed journals.

What happens is that in most brain-training studies, researchers usually measure improvement in cognitive skills such as memory based on a single independent task, rather than a range of tasks that represent a broad ability. A clear line needs to be drawn between improvements on a particular task and improvements in general cognitive ability – both of which suggest two very different things. This is the part where most people are being misled. Many brain-training companies blur the lines between these two distinctions, and generalise the findings of such research towards their flavour. Regardless of whether such results were misinterpreted or exaggerated as part of the marketing strategy, many consumers are led to believe that improving on a specific game will positively impact their cognitive abilities and capability in life. Therefore, please take note that the consensus among neuroscientific and cognitive researchers is that this is not so.

**CONCLUSION**

While brain-training games are fun and engaging, there is insufficient scientific evidence at this point in time to indicate that they significantly improve one’s memory, intelligence, problem solving, or other higher-order cognitive abilities.

What the researchers did find is that people who play brain-training games do get better at those games, i.e. the more you play the game, the better you’ll get at it. However, this is pretty much not a surprise as this only proves the old saying of “practice makes perfect”.

Hearing said that, if you love playing these brain games, I’m not suggesting you to stop. I’m merely informing you not to expect too much from it, aside from being able to “travel into an alternate dimension” where you are the protagonist of that world, or “speed up time” as you realised that a few hours have passed before you know it.

To end on a happier note, check out some tips (see column to the right), supported and validated by numerous scientific research studies, on how you can increase your cognitive performance!
By VINESH NAIDU
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A n eventful year has drawn to a close; another year of learning and growth. As it should be of course, the only thing is, it’s never that optimistic when you are in the eye of the storm! We had our national carrier losing two aircraft in unforeseeable circumstances, oil prices plummeting, and the rise of new terror in the Middle East. We even had mini tornadoes hitting the outskirts of Kedah.

What on earth has any of these to do with a leadership problem? I hear you say! Everything, really. These are what we would call “extenuating factors”. It is consultant speak for “stuff we never anticipated but have thrown a spanner in the works therefore I hope you are not too surprised!”

MOTIVATIONAL TUNE
Well, first off the individual has to ensure the right motivations are in place. And this also needs to constantly be fine-tuned. People grow, mature and change, and personal motivations change and grow along with it. Ensuring the harmony of all these factors is what contributes to personal excellence and thereby having a productive employee in your team.

Personal excellence therefore starts from the individual. What usually helps in the discovery process is to ask questions that cut to the chase and force us to be honest about our motivations like:

- Why are you here today?
- What do you expect to contribute, and in turn, gain from the endeavours?
- How will this work make a difference to you and those who are impacted by your work?

WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO
Simon Sinek, the author best known for popularising the concept of “The Golden Circle”, believes leadership, and thereby, personal excellence, emerges from understanding the “why” behind your work. “People don’t buy what you do; people buy why you do it”, he is fond of saying.

As and he explains in his TED talk – you can watch it online, it’s free – the very way we think about our motivation isn’t quite right. “Every single person, every single organisation on the planet knows what they do, 100%.”

“Some know how they do it, whether you call it your differentiated value proposition or your proprietary process or your USP (unique selling proposition). But very, very few people or organisations know why they do what they do.

And by ‘why’ I don’t mean ‘to make a profit’. That’s a result. It’s always a result. By ‘why’ I mean: What’s your purpose? What’s your cause? What’s your belief? Why does your organisation exist? Why do you get out of bed in the morning? And why should anyone care?”

Get those right, or at least aligned and you are on your way to ensuring excellence, both personal and work – which would lead to organisational excellence. If you could do anything at all without having to worry about what others think – no need to worry about money, no need to worry about getting good grades – what would you do?

Play computer games all day? Okay but let’s analyse that a little bit. What exactly are you getting from that activity? You are good at it therefore you are beating everybody else, and that’s the exciting part. Seen from another angle, you are improving your thought process and coordination. Does that excite you? Is that helping your growth?

Or you want to solve the water irrigation problems in Africa. Or the traffic jam in Kuala Lumpur. Why would you want to do that?

In the end, most of us want to do something that makes a difference. And that feeling of making a difference is ultimately what’s most important for your own happiness and fulfilment. And that is what will enable us to continue to seek personal excellence.

In 1931, Gandhi was invited to speak to the British Parliament. As Gandhi was one of the most vocal supporters of Indian independence, his visit was greeted with suspicion and caution by a parliament who strongly opposed Gandhi’s passion. The great leader stood with no notes and spoke for two hours. He spoke eloquently and with passion, and when he finished, his audience stood and applauded as one. It was an extraordinary moment for a truly remarkable man. Later, an English journalist asked one of Gandhi’s assistants how he was able to stand with no notes and speak so brilliantly for such a long time.

The assistant smiled and was quoted as saying, “You don’t understand Gandhi. You see, what he thinks is what he feels. What he feels is what he says. What he says is what he does.”

“What Gandhi feels, what he thinks, what he says, and what he does are all the same. He does not need notes.”

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is where magic happens. Finding the reason behind the actions for personal excellence is only one leg of it. Ensuring it is infused with passion and purpose is the second part which completes the circle.

MY THOUGHTS
So for your leadership challenge of the day, go forth and ensure you have your motivation, purpose, and passion aligned to your current realities, that in turn will help you in seeking personal excellence! All the best for this year.
Through the years, I have been told many times that the only way to grow in strength is to confront whatever fears that may be present.

**What is fear?**

Fear: an emotion that seems almost as powerful as love. I’m sure we can all think of many examples of times when we, or even people we know, have missed out on some wonderful opportunity simply because we allowed ourselves to be held back by one or two limiting beliefs. Our instincts (we believe) usually seek to serve us with our best interests at heart. We often talk about trusting our “gut reaction”, and while there may be some benefit in adopting this approach, it depends on the circumstance.

It’s more often the case, however, that we give way to fear far too easily, afraid of whatever bad thing that might happen should we proceed with a particular course of risky action.

**Why fear?**

Fear has its uses. It’s quite handy to have if one is ever faced with, say, a hungry tiger or a venomous snake. The heightened sense of alertness is of great benefit in these situations. But, thankfully, we don’t often experience those kinds of encounters that people in far-off places may face with fair regularity.

Nowadays, fear is often irrational condition that leads us to naturally incline towards the negative, as we weigh up our choices.

**EXPel limiting beliefs**

It has been said that our fears are the greatest liars we will ever know. Fear is as powerful as we allow it to be. For as long as we allow ourselves to listen to those limiting beliefs, fear will always have the upper hand; never relenting in achieving its goal of holding us back from experiencing and enjoying life to the fullest extent possible.

But although some say that confronting fear gives us great strength, it doesn’t quite work with such immediacy.

**LEAning In**

Very few people have a natural inclination to lean in towards the fear and meet it head on. We do not allow ourselves the chance to know fear for the fraud it is. In slowly developing the skill to lean in towards our fears, we find that we are not immediately endowed with Herculean strength. On the contrary, we voluntarily open ourselves up to experiencing the greatest sense of vulnerability that we have known.

We are, for a brief time, completely open and exposed, essentially putting ourselves in a position of danger. And although that danger may be an irrational perception, nevertheless, it is very real to us in that moment, and that’s what counts.

By making a conscious effort to go against the grain and lean in to our fears, to chip away at our inclination to think towards the negative, almost immediately, our fears and limiting beliefs depreciate in their power.

**THE Time Is Now**

We have, all of us, a great potential to experience and accomplish many things; it’s just a pity that many of us are left without a sense of urgency to realise that what holds us back can be very easily overcome if only we apply the courage and a little effort to do so. We also have limited time, and whether or not one believes in reincarnation or in an eternal heaven or that there exists nothing after this life, one thing is certain: we each only have this lifetime once — you will never know life quite in the same way that you are now living it.
My hopes for Gen-Y

By LILY CHEAH
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EAR friends, I don’t know your names, backgrounds, nor much else about you. But you and I, we have at least one thing in common. We are people belonging to what they call Generation Y (“Gen-Y”), those born between 1980 and the mid-1990s. Like all generations before us, we have been shaped by the world we grew up in. Technology was a normal part of growing up, and as a result, connectivity and content availability, quantity and variety have never been an issue. Growing up with Friends, Xanga, blogspot, MySpace and more, we are used to platforms where we “have a voice”.

Especially for middle-class Gen-Y in Malaysia like myself, many have also had the privilege of living off the fruit of our parents’ labour. Though we still have battles of our own with affordability of transporta- tion and housing, the struggle for survival has eased for those with parents who have worked hard to provide.

Naturally, this upbringing has uncon- sciously informed our expectations and behaviours in the working world. It’s no surprise then that many will comment that Gen-Y in urban Malaysia are driven more by “purpose” and “passion” rather than “survival”.

We are drawn to environments where a variety of views is encouraged, and where we have room to express ourselves. In the Deloitte Millennial (Generation Y) Survey 2014, more than 25% of the Millennial respondents from 28 countries asked “for a chance” to show their leadership skills.

And being used to a faster pace, we crave progression. Seventy-five per cent believe companies could do more to develop future leaders.

Our perceived strengths seem to revolve around the areas of optimism and technol- ogy. In an EY survey conducted in 2013 with Baby Boomer, Generation X (”Gen-X”) and Gen-Y respondents, we scored highly for being “enthusiastic”, “tech savvy” and social media opportunists.

We were ranked higher than Baby Boomers in the areas of “collaborations”, “adaptability”, being “entrepreneurial”, and were perceived to be slightly better than both Gen-X and Boomers in building diverse teams and not discriminating on attributes like race, gender and age.

But along with our strengths, are attrib- utes that we have been criticised for. I am sure, that like me, you too have heard groans about Gen-Y being “entitled”, “demanding” and having no “staying power”.

Results of the 2013 EY survey, though conducted with respondents in the United States, don’t stray far from comments on the local grapevine.

Our generation scored the lowest com- pared to Gen-X and Baby Boomers in the perception of being a “team player” (48%), “hardworking” (39%) and “a productive part of our organisation” (38%).

We also scored the highest in negative traits like being “difficult to work with” (36%), “titled” (68%) and “lacking relevant experience” (39%).

I stress again that these conclu- sions are based on perceptions of an entire generation. Like any other generalisation, they cer- tainly don’t apply to each and every Gen-Yer.

But perceptions don’t come from thin air, and my hope for our generation is for us to seriously acknowledge the criticisms levied against us and ask ourselves how we, as a whole, could do better.

To help guide my thoughts, I consulted the opinion of Paul Chan, who serves as director of several boards, including that of Prudential Assurance Malaysia Berhad. An executive council member of the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA), Chan is also a found- ing member of the Malaysian Alliance of Corporate Directors, and an executive committee member of the Global Network of Director Institutes.

It was appropriately after a panel dis- cussion on diversity at this year’s MIA Conference that I had the privilege of meet- ing Chan. Being a Baby Boomer, and having the bird’s eye view in multiple companies, I sought his thoughts on Gen-Y in the work- place, and his advice on what we could do to improve.

So as 2014 draws to an end, and a tough 2014 it has been for our country and the world, and we set aspirations for ourselves, our families and our organisations, here are my three generational aspirations for Gen-Y. I hope that you join me in fulfilling them:

1 That we will be humble and have a healthy sense of dependence on the right people

“Humility” was what Chan mentioned when I asked for his thoughts on what Gen-Y could work on. Though not a great pill to swallow, I see where he is coming from.

Perhaps because technology has allowed us to see the world from the comfort of our desktop and mobile devices, we can tend to carry a sense of having experienced many things even in our shorter life spans.

As we continue to mature and grow in our experiences and skills, I hope that we balance our achievements and knowledge with the understanding that we still have a lot to learn, especially from those older than us.

2 That we will build resilience for the mountains worth climbing

I concurred with Chan on his observation that older generations in Malaysia, in gen- eral, are more resilient because of economic circumstances during upbringing. It’s not a rarity for example to meet Baby Boomers who have spent the majority of their careers deep diving and weathering multiple seasons in one company. It’s simi- larly not uncommon to meet a Gen-Y who is feeling dissatisfied about their current place of work and is planning to leave as a result.

I do often ask myself why this is the case. Is it that we run from challenges? Perhaps, we have a wrong view of pain and struggle? Or are we just more honest about what we want?

Whatever the case may be for you and me, my hope is that Gen-Y will have resil- ience to face challenges that come our way (because they will), and be able to discern the battles that are worth fighting.

3 That we build authentic relationships and make our presence “positively felt”

In the EY survey, Gen-Y was ranked highest in the trait of being “difficult to work with”. In general, Gen-Y aren’t perceived to be as good at relating to others. The more Gen-Y learns about others, the better,” advises Chan. “Then with this knowledge and your skills, make your presence positively felt.”

As our workplaces become increasingly diverse, and with Generation Z soon com- ing into the picture, my hope is for Gen-Y to continue to develop our ability to build bonds with others and consistently seek ways to add value to our workplaces.

So in 2015, may we invest time and effort into understanding, empathising and build- ing relationships with members of different generations, and make a positive contribu- tion both in skill and attitude.

To a successful 2015 and greater days ahead, fellow Gen-Yers. Let’s journey on.

Lily Cheah leads the Engagement team at Leaderonomics. As a Gen-Y herself, she aspires to always find a balance between having the confidence to contribute and a humility to learn, since extremes, as she has learned the hard way, are unhelpful. She expresses gratitude again to Paul Chan for sharing his wisdom. To share your thoughts with her, email lily.cheah@leaderonomics.com
“NEW YEAR QUOTES!”

**SIR RICHARD BRANDON**
“Time you’re first thinking through an idea, it’s important not to get bogged down in complexity. Thinking simply and clearly is hard to do.”

**STEVE JOBS**
“Quality is more important than quantity. One home run is much better than two doubles.”

**HENRY STANLEY HASKINS**
“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

**NAPOLEON HILL**
“If you cannot do great things, do small things in a great way.”

**THEODORE ROOSEVELT**
“Believe you can and you’re halfway there.”

**FRANCIS OF ASSISI**
“Start by doing what’s necessary, then what’s possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

**CHARLES R. SWINDOLL**
“If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters. Excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude.”

**DR. SEUSS**
“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself, any direction you choose.”

**STEPHEN COVEY**
“We patient with yourself. Self-growth is tender; it’s holy ground. There’s no greater investment.”

**SCOTT HAMILTON**
“The only disability in life is a bad attitude.”

**DALE CARNEGIE**
“If you believe in what you are doing, then let nothing hold you up in your work. Much of the best work of the world has been done against seeming impossibilities.”

**WILLIAM FAULKNER**
“Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Don’t bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.”

**JOE SABA**
“You don’t have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great.”

**JAMES COOK**
“Do just once what others say you can’t do, and you will never pay attention to their limitations again.”

**GEORGE ELIOT**
“It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

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**REFLECTIONS 2015 HERE WE COME!**

**JERMAINE BEE**
**ON TALENT DEVELOPMENT**
The year 2014 was great for learning as I led a team of 14 learning and development specialists responsible for business sales and growth. Having a dynamic team of people constantly striving for greatness, I would say it had been a fulfilling experience journeying with the team on the various challenges we faced, building high quality processes, standards and competencies while assisting organisations in achieving their people development goals.

**ADVICE FOR ORGANISATIONS**
On the external front, having met and understood the various issues faced by organisations from various industries, I would say one key issue that should be the focus for 2015 would be of “greater talent retention and development”. Not only will there be a scarcity of talent, there will also be the ongoing challenge to retain good talent; followed by the need for talent development.

*With the trend of the generation to come, there will be a crucial need to ensure your organisation is equipped with the necessary preventive measures such as having a great and meaningful work culture as well as having the right standards and processes to stay relevant among the upcoming talents, whom I believe will bring sustainable growth to your organisation.*

**ANDREW LAU**
**ON YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**
The one big thing we learnt as a team was that bringing the best for young leaders would often challenge us to unlearn and relearn. We had to tear down things, which we thought were great, and we had to build something new again. While it would have been easier to remain at status quo, we want to hold on to the values of constantly pushing ourselves – the same values we ask young leaders in campus to aspire to.

*For undergraduate talent, key human resources trends will revolve around companies creating external talent pools to be able to have a sustainable pipeline especially for top tier talent.*

Part of the talent pool will involve investing in the leadership development of these students.

*We see more and more companies doing this and achieving great results. The practice of picking and choosing ready-made talent is a thing of the past.*

**ADVICE FOR CAMPUS STUDENTS AND EMPLOYERS**
I think we need to realise that both the students and employers need each other.

*Both need to play proactive roles in bridging the expectation and competency gaps.*

*Companies shouldn’t just tell students about the gaps – but invest in the development of the students.*

*In return, students should see high value in joining companies who care about their personal development.*

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*Jermaine heads the learning and development team in Leaderonomics, and Andrew heads the Leaderonomics Campus team. They can be reached at jermaine.bee@leaderonomics.com and andrew.lau@leaderonomics.com respectively. For more leadership content, visit www.leaderonomics.com*