NEW YEAR RESOLUTION
CRANK UP THE RESOLUTION FOR CRYSTAL CLARITY
PAGES 5–7
RESOLUTION ON HIGH

AS soon as I read it, I had to contact Joseph Tan to tell him that his account of resolution-setting is the best I have read in ages. In his wonderfully witty yet enlightening manner, he talks about the quality of our resolutions – from fuzzy and grainy to such high definition that TV stars would be clamoring to touch up their make-up.

And while you’re at it, he says, go for 52 weekly reflections!

We’ve been doing quite a bit of reflection in past weeks. Today, we share the lessons learnt from corporate Malaysia in 2014 and how we can apply them in 2015. And our apprentice-no-more Jonathan Yabut walks us through 10 workplace resolutions we might want to consider in 2015.

On embarking on new experiences, Chris Roebuck considers the value of mindfulness to businesses. He is quick to point out that introducing change, even beneficial change that helps alleviate employee stress, is all for nought if better leadership could have prevented the initial pressure on employees altogether.

And while we’re on the topic of avoidable stress, neutralise your colleague! But in the best possible way. The advice Morag Barrett provides on dealing with toxic colleagues may be quite unexpected.

In our A Day in the Life column, Lim Lay Hsuan helps us understand who thanatologists are – a valuable yet scarce resource in our country.

The words of Cassandra Ong, once an Ultimate frisbee skeptic, now self-proclaimed ultimatezombie just leap off the page convincing us of the leadership lessons from the sport, and perhaps opening a window into why “Ultimate” is apt. Loh Si Yan reveals her inner child and love for cartoons (or if you prefer, animation, especially if you’re a group of adults watching Kio without nieces or nephews present!). When circumstances needed him to, the blue (flightless) macaw Blu had to find the strength and courage to fly right out of his comfort zone.

And at the crux of all the fervour with resolution-making is the ability to change. With regard Joseph’s low, mid and high resolution, I admit my first rock-climbing experience (unlike that of our final contributor Lee Hwai Tah) was probably on of our final contributor Lee Hwai Tah) was probably on resolution, I admit my first rock-climbing experience (unlike that of our final contributor Lee Hwai Tah) was probably on resolution, I admit my first rock-climbing experience (unlike that of our final contributor Lee Hwai Tah) was probably on resolution, I admit my first rock-climbing experience (unlike that of our final contributor Lee Hwai Tah) was probably on.

In the legal fraternity, we recognise the value of this tool in unloading our cluttered mind to a place of clarity and focus.

In the corporate rat race, things often move at a pace that forces us to “ride with the wind”, lest we are left behind.

In the process of doing so, we often forget to take a step back to review what we have originally planned for the year. Hence, make a conscious decision to go back to your written resolutions on a regular basis to check on your progress towards achieving your plans.

Don’t repeat the mistake of reviewing them only when December comes knocking.

Also, don’t treat resolution review as a test whereby you pass or fail. Instead, use it as a self-discovery exercise to know yourself better and connect the dots in your life.

Look back on your little successes (written down in Tip 1) to spur you on to achieve other pending resolutions.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in last week’s “Our Two Cents” article, keep in mind that what we plan may not always work out the way we want them to. After all, many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Divine’s purpose that prevails in the end.

What’s more important is that you enjoy the journey to the finishing line!

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01 “What matters most is how well you walk through the fire.”
   ~ Charles Bukowski

02 “When you’re trying to motivate yourself, appreciate the fact that you’re even thinking about making a change. And as you move forward, allow yourself to be good enough.”
   ~ Alice Domar

03 “You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”
   ~ C.S. Lewis

04 “Let our New Year’s resolution be this: we will be there for one another as fellow members of humanity, in the finest sense of the word.”
   ~ Göran Persson

05 “One resolution I have made, and try always to keep, is this:
   To rise above the little things.”
   ~ John Burroughs

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

TRY THIS!

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

Please provide your full name, occupation (designation and employer) and telephone number.

RATS, WHAT A RACE!

By LIM LAY HSUAN

layhsuan.lim@leaderonomics.com

IT’s usually easier to start a race with the initial excitement than to actually maintain that pace and consistency with the aim of reaching the finishing line.

The same applies when it comes to our “annual run”.

We often start the year well with a new perspective armed with things we want to do and accomplish.

As months go by, weighted down by unexpected hurdles and “injuries”, can we still run the race with a sense of focus, determination and enthusiasm?

Or, will we see our new year resolutions sadly going down the drain one by one? After all, research has shown that by the second half of the year, less than 50% of people are still on track with their new year resolutions. By year end, the number declines to about 10%.

Consider these two tips to help you stay on course:

1 WRITE THEM DOWN

First things first. Have you written what you have thought of achieving this year on paper (or typed and saved in your mobile gadgets)? If you haven’t, it’s highly recommended for you to do so.

Unknowingly, the act of writing things down opens up a world of possibilities, besides helping us to remember better. It is a useful tool to unload our cluttered mind to a place of clarity and focus.

In the legal fraternity, we recognise the importance of written documents.

Likewise, so is this “documentation” of our resolutions as a personal commitment and accountability to our plans for the year.

Don’t just write your resolutions, but record your achievements too along the way.

2 STEP BACK AND REVIEW

In the corporate rat race, things often move at a pace that forces us to “ride with the wind”, lest we are left behind.

In the process of doing so, we often forget to take a step back to review what we have originally planned for the year.

Hence, make a conscious decision to go back to your written resolutions on a regular basis to check on your progress towards achieving your plans.

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Do you have any suggestions or feedback on our content, get in touch with the Leaderonomics team at editor@leaderonomics.com

For advertising and advertorial, please contact Pravin Kumar at pravin.kumar@leaderonomics.com or +6013 2177 7850

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Want practical tips for success on your way home from work? We’re on
LESSONS LEARNT FROM CORPORATE MALAYSIA

By KAREN NEOH
karen.neoh@leaderonomics.com

The year 2014 flew by with many touch points with people and companies new to me. Several have left their indelible mark.

My own company has undergone changes and immense growth, and I have observed keenly how some people have thrived under the pressure.

1. TALENTCORP – MOVE AS ONE

In my first week at Leaderonomics, I was introduced to the team at TalentCorp Malaysia. It was to be the start of many a late night working jointly on projects, and to be honest when our first project came to a close. I had more people I had worked with in the TalentCorp office than in my own.

There are three lessons I learnt from working with (and among) the TalentCorp team.

- Know what is important (and know what your stakeholders need – even before they know it themselves!)
- In my trying to understand its needs, the TalentCorp team lead was always very clear what the project objectives were, and how it sat in the overall organisational objectives.
- Once everyone involved understood it well, things fell into place more readily and even if it didn’t, things were resolved with minimal fuss.

2. JOHOR PORT BHD – SPEED+

During a leadership programme at Johor Port last year, a participant raised a question on speed, sparking a lively discussion on the importance and downside of speed in business.

“I could not agree more. Speed is critical in this day and age. Yet, we should only speed once we are clear where we want to go and how we want to get there,” says Roshan.

Lesson for 2015: Speed only when you are clear where you are going. If not, slow down and figure out your bearings.

3. NESTLÉ MALAYSIA – PEOPLE FIRST

In June 2014, I met chief financial officer of Nestlé Malaysia, Marc Seiler over a conversation on many topics that somehow kept circling back to people power: at Nestlé.

“I could end right there! Because it is to me. Several have left their indelible mark.

Of course, we talked about the people at GTI Media Asia. You inspired by their energy!

Lesson for 2015: Commitment. Do you know what your priorities are? Is your organisation committed to making it happen – up and down (left and right)?

4. GTI MEDIA – NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH

The people at GTI Media Asia. You meet them and can’t help but be inspired by their energy.

And after meeting more of their people and understanding the vision of their founder, I can see why they stay charged up like the Energizer bunny.

CEO Hee Kim Fah and his team demonstrate how purpose + perseverance + commitment can have a significant impact on their organisation.

Lesson for 2015: Is your team able to survive and thrive in crises? Are they equipped with the right skills, mindset and motivation to reinvent themselves?

On a related note, Roshan recently shared this great lesson from Suria Group (Sabah).
I attended an excellent discussion at Cass Business School last year on the potential value to business of mindfulness. For the uninstructed this is a practice developed from Buddhism that is designed to help people “take a step back” and think about the actions they are taking in a more thoughtful and holistic perspective, not a narrow event-driven one. This is achieved through simple techniques.

In its most basic form, this may be closing your eyes and breathing slowly for one minute as an example – before considering your current position. It is an extension of the principle of counting to 10 before responding to a remark or email that annoys you.

There is clear evidence that these techniques do produce physiological changes such as reduced blood pressure, heart rate and overall stress.

As a result, they are used within the healthcare field to help individuals suffering from a variety of conditions. The more difficult question is whether mindfulness makes a difference in running organisations.

**POSSIBLY, MAYBE**

The answer is probably – they certainly help employees deal with pressure and stress better, but that’s rather a waste of time and effort if better leadership removed the initial pressure in the first place.

For leaders, if it helps them to come up with more effective decisions, bearing in mind the big picture and the impact on others as well as themselves, then it will make a big difference, especially at senior levels.

There is a much bigger question about how it will systematically help the organisation.

Yes, you can run everyone through mindfulness training but if this isn’t integrated with improvements in leadership capability to minimise the impact of pressure and stress on employees that drive the need for mindfulness, I can’t see it being more than a “sticking plaster” to address the unnecessary damage caused by poor leaders.

However, more work needs to be done to confirm evidence of benefit to enable an effective business case to be presented, but the potential seems to be there given the physiological research and other studies.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

To explore this potential further, I have accepted an invitation to be on the advisory board for a series of future mindfulness events starting with a symposium in May 2015 being run in Zurich. These will bring together some of the leading thinkers in the field to speak and Bob Geldof, who will, no doubt, be the point in his views. I am looking forward to learning more and bringing mindfulness to a wider business audience.

Rather than a magical silver bullet for organisations, mindfulness may turn out to be another useful tool in the armoury of the effective leader and the forward thinking organisation to maximise the chances of delivering success.

**SHOULD LEADERS BE MINDFUL OF MINDFULNESS?**

By CHRIS ROEBUCK

editor@leaderonomics.com

Last year I had the pleasure of meeting Datuk Dr Fowzi Razi, group managing director of Suria Group and having some amazing conversations with him. Fowzi is very clear in his mind that leadership is a process of being moulded through fire. As we spoke about leadership experiences, we agreed that times of crisis, adversity change, and great difficulty bring out the best in our leadership.

These difficult times mould our leadership perspectives and define our leadership point of view. In fact, we don’t generally grow as leaders when we are maintaining the status quo or in our comfort zone. Situations that challenge us bring out our best. Leadership is fully internalised when we face adversity, uncertainty, suffering, disruption, alterations and other significant challenges. Leadership and pain are synonymous.

So, in light of this, if we truly seek to be great leaders, we need to go through significant pain and challenges.

**SURIA GROUP (SABAH) – LEADERSHIP IS MOULDED THROUGH FIRE**

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**FROM PAGE 3**

**PWC MALAYSIA – BEYOND DIAGNOSIS**

In Sept 2014, I met managing partner of PwC Malaysia, Sridharan Nair who had just been given the honour of CEO Champion at the Life at Work Award 2014. Several people who knew him well pre-empted our conversation with “Sri’s very modest. You really need to draw out all the good he has done for us and our organisation.”

True enough, he talked about changes in PwC Malaysia seven to eight years prior which were ahead of its time – innovations in human resource management that took into account the changing needs of individuals and families.

Changes that were well thought out, well executed and in the end very well received. And Sri constantly attributed all the good that has come about to team effort. “Sri has been a great champion. He looks out for people in the firm – he challenges you to do something you may not believe you can,” shared Florence Tan, corporate responsibility manager.

**Lesson for 2015:** Are you helping to create an environment for excellence? It’s not just the role of leaders; everyone in the organisation has a part to play.

Perhaps Jan 1 is just an arbitrary line drawn in the sand. I remember quite well, the many different “new years” we celebrated while I lived in Canada. Time does have a peculiar way of speeding up and slowing down though – rather disconcertingly, it speeds up when times are great, and slows when times are not.

So before the third quarter rolls round and my career and life goals are still waiting to be prioritised, I am going to take the lessons of 2014 and apply them to 2015.

Most definitely before we usher in the Year of the Goat!
THE 10 NEW YEAR OFFICE RESOLUTIONS

WHATEVER YOUR MOTIVATION IS, IT’S NEVER TOO LATE TO CHANGE

BY JONATHAN YABUT
editor@leaderonomics.com

1 GET TO WORK EARLIER
Do you notice that most chief executive officers and leaders are the earliest to arrive at the office?

Most people think this has to do with role modelling but there is a more functional reason behind it: they simply get more things done. Studies show that you’re at your best cognitive capacity within your first two waking hours.

Take a strategic Friday leave to set to move to greener pastures? The year

2 TAKE YOUR VACATION LEAVES
There was a time in the early 2000s when bragging your unused leave for a colleague who can’t take personal and professional reasons. If there is an emergency, someone will likely call you.

3 SEND SHORTER E-MAILS
Successful people get more things done because they keep everything short and concise, including e-mails. E-mails are documented impressions of how a person thinks and organises his or her thoughts, so write e-mails that are clear and straight to the point.

Whenever possible, use bullet points, tables, and known acronyms. Not only do you save time from writing less, your colleagues will also thank you for making them read less. Finally, don’t discuss ideas over e-mails like ping pong. Go to the person directly, or make a quick phone call to settle things immediately.

4 CUT THE PAINFUL COMMUTE – MOVE CLOSER TO WORK
It’s normal for city folk in South-East Asia to travel an average of two to four hours to work because of traffic congestion. Remember that the amount of energy you put into your work and the good mood you bring home to your family are inversely proportional to the amount of stress you absorb along the road.

Long commutes destroy happiness. People who have better jobs or more houses but live far away from work are less happy than those who enjoy shorter commutes.

If it is true that every factor to success matters, you might want to consider moving closer to work. You get bonus points for more sleeping time too.

5 CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO ONCE IN A WHILE
In 1993, Delta Airlines followed a suggestion of a cabin crew to take out the lettuce as base for salads because passengers rarely ate it. In one year, the airline saved a whopping US$1.4mil just by weeding out those salads. Indeed, small ideas can deliver big things.

This 2015, think of all your projects and reports, and ask yourself: how many of these really bring in money as good as your boss’s (or even better)?

This 2015, find a mentor outside your department who can share career advice from time to time. Look for someone who can improve your negotiation skills, for example. Request the person to introduce you to more people in the company.

Think of your mentor as your sponsor. As the person climbed up the corporate ladder, think of your mentor as your sponsor. As the person climbed up the corporate ladder.

Ask about the failures and mistakes as the person climbed up the corporate ladder. Think of your mentor as your sponsor.

Think of your mentor as your sponsor. As the person climbed up the corporate ladder.

8 FIND A CAREER MENTOR BEIDES YOUR BOSS
There are many senior managers out there who are genuinely passionate in grooming their own protégés. It feels rewarding to have one, and because great leaders are never insecure to share what they know.

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9 POWER DOWN WHEN THE OCCASION CALLS FOR IT
The saying that “form follows function” is dead in 2015. In 1993, Delta Airlines followed a suggestion of a cabin crew to take out the lettuce as base for salads because passengers rarely ate it. In one year, the airline saved a whopping US$1.4mil just by weeding out those salads. Indeed, small ideas can deliver big things.

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Power down when the occasion calls for it. Power down when the occasion calls for it. Power down when the occasion calls for it.

There are more benefits to eating outside your cubicle:
- You’re likely to choose healthier food (versus the convenient fast food)
- Your networking opportunity increases by sharing a seat with someone at the cafeteria, and
- Eating is arguably the best way to bond personally and professionally with your teammates.

This 2015, be conscious of the number of times you eat lunch at your desk – you’re likely missing a lot!
THE RISKS AND FLOWS OF RESOLUTIONS
CAPTURING A BEAMING YEAR!

WE ALL HAVE THIS GREAT COMMUNITY-ALALLY WHICH COMES TO US EVERY 24-HOUR PACKAGE. HOW WE USE IT TO GAIN MORE FROM LIFE IS THE FUNDAMENTAL REASON WHY RESOLUTIONS ARE IMPORTANT.

BY JOSEPH TAN

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SAMBALICIOUS
THE RELATIONSHIP.

ON THE SURFACE, IT MAY SEEM EASIER TO WORK WITH PEOPLE OF SIMILAR STYLES, THINKING AND BACKGROUNDS BUT DIFFERENCES BRING RICHNESS AND DYNAMICS TO THE RELATIONSHIP.

In this start of the new year, Si Yan hopes you will still take time off to make some popcorn, snuggle on a couch and watch a cartoon or two — just to keep that inner child in you! Life is more fun that way. Send in your feedback to editor@leaderonomics.com. For more Movie Wisdom articles, visit www.leaderonomics.com.

MOS T people will do spring cleaning, go for a medical check-up or even throw a party as part of their yearly ritual. But my yearly ritual revolves around watching cartoons. Yes, I’m a child at heart and a fussy one too.

Not all cartoons amuse me but Rio is one of the few which has a solid story line combined with entertaining characters and musical elements, as well as little winks and innuendos for the adults too.

The story centres around Blu, a blue domesticated macaw who never learned to fly. As an extinct species, Blu has a mission to mate with the last female macaw and this sets him on a whirlwind adventure to Rio de Janeiro.

There are a few key takeaways that I thought were really good life lessons. Though these life lessons are nothing new, they are simple reminders which we need from time to time.

#1 EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE IS AN OPPORTUNITY

Before he had learned how to soar, Blu was adopted by a girl named Linda who soon became his owner and best friend. Blu was raised in a comfortable environment and enjoyed the comfort of his cage.

Let’s just say he wasn’t exactly the “birdiest” in the flock. In Rio de Janeiro, Blu eventually found the courage to learn how to fly and thwarted the smugglers who were hot on their trail.

It is a natural tendency for us to allow circumstances like family upbringing, people’s expectations and environmental factors to determine who we are as an individual.

Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because he “lacked imagination and had no good ideas”. Later he got rejected by a production house because he was told that a giant mouse on the screen would terrify women.

If Disney was a victim of his circumstances, I reckon Mickey Mouse wouldn’t exist today. The way we choose to interpret our experiences determines the way we live our lives. As the saying goes, “When you can’t change the circumstances, change yourself.”

#2 EMBRACE DIFFERENCES

Unexpectedly chained together, Blu and his fiercely independent, high flying female counterpart Jewel had to find a way to work together in order to escape from the smugglers.

In the midst of their adventures, Jewel needed to teach Blu to fly. Despite Blu not knowing how to, he used his own skills and knack for opening cage doors (due to his domesticated habitat in Minnesota). By embracing their differences, both Blu and Jewel managed to escape and developed a loving relationship too.

I’m sure you notice that our fingers are not of an equal length or size. Imagine if all our fingers were the same; our hands wouldn’t be as flexible a tool anymore.

Similarly, each individual has to embrace the differences and complement each other’s shortcomings in order to build a strong relationship.

On the surface, it may seem easier to work with people of similar styles, thinking and backgrounds but differences bring richness and dynamics to the relationship.

#3 LIVE A LIFE OF ADVENTURE

Whisked from the comfort of their home in Minnesota, both Blu and Linda took a chance to make the trip to Rio, a place very much foreign to them.

Little did they know that they were embarking on an adventure of a lifetime, where they learned about friendship, love, courage and being open to life’s many wonders.

In the end, Blu learned that the secret of flying is not through the mind but through the heart.

More often than not, our lives are like a living adventure made up of opportunities and mistakes. As time passes, growing up has meant becoming disinterested and fatigued, well at least for some.

As for others, we are waiting for the right timing — again is there ever a perfect timing? If not now, then when?

To live an adventurous life, we do need to take the necessary risks and have the courage to step out from our comfort zone and, fingers crossed, hope that our decisions reap success.

It’s uncertain, it’s difficult but it’s exciting! When things are uncertain, rest assured that you can always follow your heart as Blu did. Now go, do the things that you don’t normally do as, quoting Helen Keller, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing”.

#4 FAMILY AND (REAL) FRIENDS ARE YOUR ANCHOR

More like companions than owner and pet, Blu and Linda share a wonderful friendship. However, the love that Blu has for Jewel is so deep that he even forsakes Linda’s protection and comfort to rescue her from the smugglers.

Along the way, Blu met good bird friends — Pedro, Nico and Rafael who risked their lives to help them.

Although initially excited to attend a Carnival, Rafael instead elected to go home to his wife and kids because they were more important to him. “I thought you loved Carnival,” a bird friend says. And Rafael responded, “But I love my family much more.”

It is easy to find someone to walk with you during the bad times. To live an adventurous life, we do need to take the necessary risks and have the courage to move forward. More often than not, our lives are like a living adventure made up of opportunities and mistakes. As time passes, growing up has meant becoming disinterested and fatigued, well at least for some.

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By LOH SI YAN
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LIFE LESSONS FROM RIO
WORKING WITH A TOXIC COLLEAGUE?

COUNTER IT WITH COALS OF CARE

IF YOU'RE WILLING, TAKE THE FIRST STEP, AND THE NEXT ONE, AND THE NEXT, AND THE ONE AFTER THAT, AND KEEP AT IT UNTIL YOU HAVE DEVELOPED A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THAT PERSON

By MORAG BARRETT
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I was working with a leadership team some months ago, discussing the concepts from Cultivate: The Power of Winning Relationships, when one of the participants asked me how to deal with an adversary – a toxic colleague.

It prompted some interesting debate and discussion. Everyone present could relate to the stress this person was feeling and the impact that the toxic colleague was having across the organisation.

Now, you probably don’t have any toxic colleagues in your workplace. For you, it is bliss from nine to five.

You’re disappointed to leave at the end of the day because you’ve enjoyed the company of those around you so much, and you can’t wait to get back the following day because you miss them. You feel pity for your friends who aren’t so lucky. Perhaps they just need a bit of advice – a few suggestions to help them survive until they can work in your organisation.

However, what advice would you give in this situation?

Here are a few suggestions to effect change:

1. Change your attitude
   This probably wasn’t the first thing that you thought of. After all, it’s the toxic colleague that has the problem, not you.
   If the other person had a better attitude, then you wouldn’t be reading this article. But, you see, there’s a problem with that opinion.
   It’s that the behaviour of the person you’re struggling with, at least to a certain extent, is simply a reaction to yours.
   Imagine that you are an innocent third party. You don’t work with this person or any of his or her colleagues, but you do come within sight of this little band of conflict every day.
   From where you’re standing, how do people act in the presence of this chronic malcontent? Do they give that person a wide berth?
   Do they try not to talk to him or her?
   Do they speak softly while allowing their eyes to flit towards and then away from Mr or Ms I’ll-Bite-Your-Head-Off?
   Now imagine if people treated you that way (remember: we’re thinking of someone you know). What would your reaction be? How would it make you feel?
   Wouldn’t you perhaps be a little sensitive, a little negative, and a bit brusque?

2. Be friendly
   Here’s another one of those suggestions that you weren’t expecting. The first one was about avoiding a negative reaction.
   This time, you’re trying to “provoke” a positive one.
   This goes back to your attitude. You pretty much get what you expect.
   It’s what we call a self-fulfilling prophecy. You only notice the things that support your assumptions. If you expect to see toxicity, then that’s what you notice the most.
   Now think for a moment. What would you do if you expected the other person to be friendly to you in return?
   You’d be friendly first, right? Think of the people you work with, where friendliness among you already exists. How do they behave with them?

3. Build a relationship with that person
   (The friend to whom you make this suggestion will probably think that this is taking things a bit too far.) It’s one thing to speak to that person or to even act like a friend, but to be one? Come on. Get real.
   But, well, you see, that’s how you neutralise toxicity.
   Think about it like this: You’re heaping coals of care on that person. You’re breaking through the barriers. You’re determined to draw that person out of the dungeon in which he or she works.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Let’s face it. Whatever it is that makes a person toxic probably affects him or her more than it affects you.

If you’re willing, take the first step, and the next one, and the next, and the one after that, and keep at it until you have developed a positive relationship with that person.

You may not become BFFs (best friends forever), but you do need to find a way to work together respectfully.

In doing so, you will become an organisational antidote. And that means, on this occasion, it’s all about you.

Morag Barrett is the best-selling author of Cultivate: The Power of Winning Relationships and CEO of SkyeTeam (www.skyeteam.com), an international HR consulting and leadership development company. Morag’s experience ranges from senior executive coaching to developing leaders and teams across Europe, America and Asia. For more articles on leadership and personal development, visit www.leaderonomics.com. Get in touch through editor@leaderonomics.com
A JOURNEY OF RELEASE
LOSS AND ‘FOUND’

By LIM LAY HSUAN
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THE one movie which left quite an impression on me when it comes to the heavier subject of people coping with grief is Reign Over Me. In the story, Charlie Fineman lost his entire family in the 9/11 attack and in order to cope with his pain, retreated into a world of his own. With three major plane incidents that afflicted our country last year, grief seems to be an apparent topic of discussion, more so because grief is hardly discussed openly in our Asian context. In the process, I accidentally found out that there’s a ‘career’ as a thanatologist. I was so thankful to get hold of Dr Edmund Ng, who graciously responded.

1. TO TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF
I am a psychotherapist and a specialise in grief therapy. I was trained in counselling in Australia and obtained my doctorate in the United Kingdom through research in grief support. I subsequently received my certification in Thanatology in the United States (US). Health education and counselling (ADEC), based in the US, is the only world body that certifies thanatologists. I am the first thanatologist in Malaysia. There are now two thanatologists in Malaysia.

2. WHAT IS A THANATOLeGIST?
Thanatology is the science of dying, death and bereavement. The Association of Death Education and Counselling (ADEC), based in the US, is the only world body that certifies thanatologists. I am the first thanatologist in Malaysia. There are now two thanatologists in Malaysia.

3. ARE THERE ANY MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS?
Only those who have passed the ADEC examinations can be certified in thanatology. ADEC conducts such examinations once a year and it is a tough one to get through.

4. WHAT SPARKS YOUR INTEREST IN GRIEF MANAGEMENT?
When my first wife died of a brain aneurysm in 2005, I was devastated. I discovered that in our modern society, we are ill-equipped to handle grief. I also recall reading in the papers of the suicide of a prominent former judge, three years after his wife died. The news shocked the nation. I saw that as a public cry for help. I thought to myself that the whole nation either didn’t care about him or didn’t know how to help him in his grief. This prompted me to go for training in grief management.

5. DESCRIBE YOUR JOB SCOPE
I typically run two one-to-one grief therapy sessions on a weekday for people who find it difficult to cope with grief. Each session takes 1.5 hours. I commit them to eight weekly or fortnightly sessions. However, if they are not progressing well with their recovery, then I spend more sessions with them.

Often, those who come to see me are also suffering from depression, childhood traumas, personal problems and other mental health issues. Since I am also a psychotherapist, I take the opportunity to address these other challenges too.

6. WHAT ELSE DO YOU DO?
I also run two community-based agencies. One is a micro-finance agency called Partners in Enterprise that gives interest-free loans for small income-generating activities of the hardcore poor. The other agency is called GGP (Grace to Grieving Persons) Outreach, which supports people who have lost their loved ones. The outreach maintains a widow’s fund that gives monthly financial assistance to the poorest widows in the Klang Valley. The objective of GGP Outreach is to promote and facilitate awareness, care and involvement for grieving persons regardless of economic, racial or religious background.

I spend the rest of my typical weekday either attending to the affairs of these two NGOs (non-profit organisations) or visiting the families of the widows. Once a year, I also give a community-based psychoeducation seminar on grief support so that newly bereaved persons from the public can learn how to grieve healthily.

There are other involvements that arise on a need basis. For instance:
- MH170 tragedy – I conducted a seminar to equip caregivers and volunteers from the Befrienders Malaysia on how to reach out to family members of the missing passengers.
- Typhoon Yolanda – I was invited by the University of the Philippines and the Philippine Psychological Association to train their mental health workers in grief recovery work. I brought a team of nine Malaysian volunteers to Tacloban in April 2014 to conduct the first grief recovery programme for 300 disaster survivors there.

7. HOW HAS YOUR JOURNEY BEEN?
It is often satisfying to be able to make a difference in those who are going through difficult seasons. When you first meet them, their faces are downcast, their eyes tear, their hair uncombed and they are shabbily dressed. You initially see some of them so overwhelmed by their pain that they are hardly functioning in their simplest routines. After a few sessions, you begin to notice a smile on their faces and they are well-dressed. Through interventions, they begin to make progress in their healing process and they start to move on in life. To me, this is priceless.

8. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES IN YOUR WORK?
The most challenging part is trying to reach out to clients who are not open or genuine with you. They may be having so much fear in looking inwards to their true self, while others just put up a brave front to protect themselves. Grief therapy is not just a cognitive process. To make good progress, we must get to the emotional level as the grief process involves emotions. It is also not all about crying. Our attitudes and perspectives must also change because our emotions, thoughts and behaviour are inter-related. For me to help them, they must be willing to help themselves.

9. HOW DO YOU DISENGAGE YOURSELF FROM THE WORK YOU DO?
We are professionally trained to empathise with our clients but not carry their burdens by taking on what is their responsibility. I often debrief by discussing difficult cases with people who understand what I’m talking about, including my present wife who helps me with some of the therapy sessions. I am careful to see that I have sufficient time off for rest and recreation. We cannot give all the time without receiving and getting recharged.

10. WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST REWARDING?
Seeing my clients smile again and move on in their life despite their loss. This makes living more worthwhile, and you feel more complete as a human being. This is what keeps me going.

Some clients may never acknowledge you after returning to their normal lives, but you know the difference you’ve made to help them recover. Once in a while, someone would want to show gratitude and this is a bonus. Some will buy you something to eat while others offer to make a financial donation to the GGP widow’s fund to help the poor widows in our midst.

I am also most pleased when they say they want to use their experience and be a volunteer to reach out to other grieving people. As a result, I now have a team of core volunteers who are trained by me to reach out to others as lay counselors.

11. YOUR ADVICE TO PEOPLE WHO MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN THIS FIELD
There is no glamour in doing something away from the limelight, and the person in front of you is crying most of the time. It is not fun empathising with someone suffering in the lowest moments of his or her life. Neither is it going to be financially rewarding as a profession. Thus, you must be fully convinced that your motivation and interest to become a thanatologist is solely to help others who are hurting without expecting anything in return. This only comes when you do it out of love and compassion for another human being.

Email us your thoughts at editor@leaderonomics.com. For more A Day in the Life articles, visit www.leaderonomics.com
ULTIMATE FRISBEE

IN THE SPIRIT OF THE GAME AND LEADERSHIP

By CASSANDRA ONG editor@leaderonomics.com

Pic by Tino Tran

EXACTLY a year ago, after much scepticism, I finally relented and decided to give ultimate frisbee a go after being a victim of constant propaganda by a group of “ultimazombies” I know. Since then, I have been an ultimazombie myself. There seems to be a strange appeal with throwing around a piece of plastic from one end of the field to the other. After I did it once, I wanted to do it again, and again. Every time I did so, I left feeling happy. Happier each time.

SO, WHAT IS ULTIMATE FRISBEE?

To begin with, it is a non-contact team sport which is played with a flying disc, in which the goal of each team on both ends of the field is to get the disc to their respective opposing ends, called end zones. The game takes its origins from New Jersey where it started back in 1967. In the early 2000s, a group of teachers from the International School of Kuala Lumpur introduced ultimate frisbee to the Malaysian community. It has since gained a lot of traction.

WHAT MAKES ULTIMATE FRISBEE UNIQUE?

Compared with most sports, a game of ultimate is self-refereed. It runs on one essential element, which is the “spirit of the game.” It encourages fair play and sportsmanship. So, should disputes arise between teams, they are usually resolved by team captains. Should there be irreconcilable differences, though they rarely happen, captains follow standardised rules by the World Flying Disc Federation.

The amazing thing is that ultimate’s self-refereing system works beautifully and rarely ever fails. Therefore, ultimate frisbee is a great place to build your leadership competencies, as so many of the lessons I have learnt in ultimate are transferrable to other aspects of my life.

● Trust your teammates

In ultimate frisbee, mutual trust between team members is necessary to get to the end zone. We see this spirit reflected more so in “hat tournaments”, which is another unique aspect of ultimate frisbee. Hat tournaments are not your average sports tournament. Players are sorted into teams by the organisers. This is done by randomly drawing names from a hat, and teams are balanced out based on skills and experience. Players range from veterans to absolute newbies, and consist of people you don’t know or have never been in a team with.

The captain of the team is chosen based on experience and skill level. The trick is that teams usually need to trust that their new and unfamiliar teammate will do his or her part, be it in an end zone defence or catching the disc.

As a result, hat teams tend to form very strong bonds after a tournament.

Similarly, in a project, when you have a goal to achieve, your progress is only as good as the level of trust between your teammates. By trusting your teammates, you can build dynamics with one another and fully harness the power of collaboration to see a project through to success.

● Great leaders empower others

A great place to see this in action is during a hat tournament. As players in a team also consist of newbies, more often than not, they tend to be intimidated by other veteran players. The tournaments are a celebration of brilliant team captains who have the ability to motivate their team players, whereby they develop rapport amongst the team members and build confidence, especially in less experienced players.

Whether it is through an exciting able team cheer or a rousing motivational speech, they take good care of their teammates by means of empowerment.

I am constantly reminded of the times that my team captain believed in my ability to cut better or jump higher to “sky” (catch) the disc, when I didn’t believe in myself.

Likewise, when working in teams for a project, the leader of the team is in charge of morale. Leaders are able to bring out the best in those who lack faith in themselves and help them realise their true potential.

● Your actions can affect others

Ultimate frisbee builds responsibility and accountability. When you drop the disc or fail to catch it, a “turnover” happens, in which possession of the disc shifts over to the other team. As a result, your team has to work harder to return the disc to their possession, meaning that their initial efforts had gone to waste. The guilt will then begin to build up within you, and you’ll try very hard not to drop the disc again the next time.

In team projects, you are responsible to carry out the task you have been delegated with utmost care and commitment. You are one of the puzzle pieces that will complete the whole picture, so if you fail to do so with reasonable care, you will affect the progress of what your team has done so far.

● Always learn something new

Ultimate frisbee pushes people to learn and master new skills all the time. It’s difficult to try to develop another skill when you haven’t mastered one.

In that sense, the learning curve for ultimate is rather steep and requires patience, as well as leaving one’s comfort zone.

When I started playing ultimate, I didn’t believe in my ability to flick the disc half-field. Being an extremely impatient person who loves to see immediate results, it was out of my comfort zone and I was frustrated. After a few months, I was surprised by my own ability to flick the disc half-field. Not only did I ace it, I also felt more confident in myself.

In team projects, one should always take the initiative to learn something new, no matter how long it takes. Learning is a long and continuous process, and should never stop beyond the classroom. After all, what does one have to lose from learning something new?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Deciding to play ultimate is one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life. There are many more leadership competencies one can amass from playing ultimate frisbee, so why don’t you join a pick-up, give it a try and share what you’ve learnt, too?

Cassandra originally thought that frisbee could only be played with pet dogs, but her perception completely changed when she finally surrendered to constant badgering to try out ultimate. Her first pick-up was not her last. To connect with Cassandra, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com. For more Starting Young articles, visit www.leaderonomics.com.
FLOW WITH CHANGE, GROW WITH CHANGE

DON’T RESIST, LET GO

By LEE HWAI TAH
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Life is like stepping into the river, for it’s an endless flow of change—you never step into the same river twice. Nothing stays the same, the only constant is change. Yet many of us live under the illusion that life is constant.

Consider our physiology for a moment. From breath to breath, our bodies exchange so many atoms that we change the makeup of our physiology, moment by moment.

EMBRACING CHANGE

I’ve read that over the course of a year, 98% of all our atoms are exchanged for new ones. We are quite literally new beings each year! Every breath and every moment are a constant flow of endless experience of change.

We can’t stop the river from flowing. We have no choice in the matter. This is a part of the price of admission to this thing called life.

At every moment, our atoms of our being are changing. Our thoughts, emotions, feelings and relationships with everything in the world and people around us are changing all the time.

Our only choice in the matter is this: our capacity and ability to adapt and to learn.

Learning to be open to opportunities of learning can be difficult.

Quite often, we are forced to embrace certain lessons the hard way—like a child who is dragged kicking and screaming.

Someone once said this: People are more likely to change because they feel the heat than because they see the light.

THE ROCK CLIMBING METAPHOR

Positive change requires letting go of old patterns and taking a fresh approach.

That reminds me of my first rock climbing experience at Krabi (Thailand) about six years ago.

The rock around Railay in Krabi is all natural limestone and is a world-class rock climbing destination. As a newbie, I’d cling on too tightly to all the tiny nooks and cracks my fingers could find.

Many times, I’d find myself hanging on too long at one spot, not trusting my next step. Soon I’d hear my rock climbing instructor beneath me yelling, “Let go! Step up! Move!”

If I did not let go from what I was gripping so tightly to, there was no way I could reach out for the next crack above.

And there was no way I could remain stationary at one spot for too long, for my limbs would tire out and begin shaking as my muscles failed.

Then I observed the rock climbing experts around me zipping effortlessly up the walls.

One thing I noticed was this: they do not grip the rocks very tightly at all—just firm enough to propel them to the next height.

It’s a continuous and seamless flow of movements of gripping and letting go, all the while using their legs to push them higher and higher.

And there was nothing in their mind—they told me it’s empty because they don’t have to think much, unlike the thoughts of newbies like me who over-analysed our every step.

It was a joy to watch them climb. It was a beautiful display of the art of exchanging the old for the new.

There can be no reaching up, no real progress, no new discoveries without first letting go of the old.

It’s okay not to hang on to the old for very long. Let them go.

Many times, the pain you may experience when you let things go is imaginary.

Let me ask you a few questions:

● How many times have you missed a turning while driving on the road only to discover a new, better route?

● Have you, in the past, lost something precious like a job or relationship only to connect with a better one later?

● How many painful experiences did you have in the past that ended up being the most instructive?

CHANGE, OUR GREAT TEACHER

Change constantly challenges our current reality by forcing a new reality to rush in.

If we’re open to it and are ready to adapt and learn, new exciting possibilities flow into our lives.

There can be no reaching up, no real progress, no new discoveries without first letting go of the old.

Accept that change is here to stay. Live in such a way that reflects the fact you’ll never step into the same river twice.