POWERS FOR GOOD

WHAT DO THE AVENGERS, SPIDEY, THE AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D AND OUR DADS HAVE IN COMMON?

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KAREN SAYS

USING OUR POWERS FOR GOOD

Our team had great fun putting together this week’s issue centred around The Avengers! Just reading the great articles contributed by our team of thought leaders – our heroes (and villains) have been sliced, diced and seen from every angle. Therein lies the power of storytellers – those who write the stories, and also those who are able to analyse, connect the dots and bring to real life the lessons learnt – a power that we consciously use in every interaction we have each day.

Elisa Dass helps us understand the various permutations of knowing a person’s talent and/or motives so that we might identify who are the Thors, Hulks and Iron Men we work with – and how we might want to approach them differently.

What happens when we are surrounded by the death and destruction of our dreams and hopes? Roshan Thiran, channeling Spidey and other superheroes, reminds us that suffering can lead to success.

From Sara Yee, we have a handy guide to the dos and don’ts that she has gleaned from being a great fan of The Avengers (although, sporting her recently acquired Loki paraphernalia, she may have a curiously dark side!).

Adrian Yap makes a beeline to another baddie – Ultron – for leadership lessons. Did that make you sit up in your seat? To be conscious use in every interaction we have each day.

There are also many unsung, unassuming heroes in our midst, and these include our parents, teachers, soldiers, firefighters and humanitarian volunteers. We often look around for heroes. For a change, why not be a “hero” to someone when a situation arises?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our chances to become heroes are not just limited to our homes and workplace. It can happen anywhere – while you’re crossing the road, driving or out shopping.

We may not have a chance to be Meher Khalil or Captain Chesley Sullenberger in our lifetime, but we can always identify opportunities to perform small heroic acts of kindness and selflessness on a daily basis.

I am reminded by this line from the cover version of the song Heroes, performed by The Wallflowers: “We can be heroes, just for one day, we can be, just for one day.”

We can all be heroes indeed, even if it’s just for one day. Are you willing to become one today?

P.S. A special tribute to our mountain heroes who put the safety of climbers above their own in the recent Sabah quake.

BY LIM LAY HUAN
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THE word “hero” is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements or noble qualities. We all need heroes. It’s an innate desire in humans to look up to someone as our role model, mentor, comforter, corrector and protector.

History makers such as Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa are examples of heroes who made a life-long impact for their stand for equality and for the poor respectively.

There are also many unsung, unassuming heroes in our midst, and these include our parents, teachers, soldiers, firefighters and humanitarian volunteers. We often look around for heroes. For a change, why not be a “hero” to someone when a situation arises?

1. AT HOME

Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals conducted a study in 2012 where-by people of all ages were asked to list down their personal heroes. About a third of the time, family members were listed. Our heroes at home, particularly our parents, need a break once a while. Why not be a hero to them by helping mum with cooking and ironing clothes, and dad with washing his car(s) and mowing the lawn? When you see one of your siblings feeling all worn out after a stressful day at work, you can offer a quick massage on their shoulders to relax them.

2. AT WORK

If you are a leader in the marketplace, get to know your people on a more personal level. Heroes, after all, ought to be personal. Otherwise, you’re just an idol on a pedestal, far from your team’s reach.

Stand up for your members if you are aware they are being treated disrespect-fully by colleagues or clients. Also, be aware of what motivates or frustrates your people at work.

In a reversal of roles, if you see your lead-er overwhelmed by too much work, be the first in line to support and fill in the work gaps for him or her.

In their busyness, drop reminders for them not to skip their lunches, or convey words of encouragement when things get tough at work.

Among co-workers, be there for them when they need someone to talk to, and keep discussions private if they are meant to be as such.

WE CAN BE HEROES

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**Motives of an individual and how we can**

**LET’S FOCUS ON THE ALIGNMENT OF TALENT AND**

Talent comes with its own challenges. Let’s focus on the alignment of talent and motives of an individual and how we can approach it.

**DEFINING MOTIVES AND TALENTS**

Werner Barkhuizen, chief executive officer of Saville Consulting defines Motives (M) as what you need or enjoy doing, and Talent (T) as the behaviours you are effective in.

“Think about it: Will I do well in what you enjoy is it always true? In our workplace, do we always find pleasure in what we do? Is there an alignment between our M and T? With these questions in mind, how does it impact an organisation’s plan for development and succession planning of their talent pool?

**SUPERHEROES AT WORK**

Taking the cue from our favourite Marvel characters, every organisation has their talent pool of Avengers. They have gifts, superpowers, gadgets, and skills that are unique to them.

Unlike our identified talents, some superheroes fully (and happily) leverage on what they have, some desire more and there are others who battle within themselves to use their superpowers.

In our talent management and succession planning efforts, we sometimes forget an important synergy that should exist in an individual – the Talent-Motive Alignment.

In most assessments, we often observe only what we can visually see – the talents – the competencies, skills and knowledge displayed by an individual. An individual may show some level of competency in leading others, developing strategies, or presenting during these assessments.

However, in most conventional assessments, the motives of the individual is not assessed. Why? We don’t know if the top performer with the good presentation skill actually enjoys doing it or wants to continue leveraging it as a key skill in his career. Motives or a person’s aspiration (or lack of it) can only be discovered with some friendly interrogation.

**WHERE ORGANISATIONS FAIL**

When planning for development and succession, many companies fail to consider this area – the alignment of what the candidates in question are good at and what they enjoy doing.

This can be translated into fully understanding their aspirations while at the same time exploring the developmental and development opportunities.

Having understood all these aspects of a person, we can gauge the individual’s fit into the company culture. The job and culture fit then plays a big role in giving us an indication of retention probability of the person.

At Leaderonomics, we create a few platforms in our assessments that allow us to discover, validate and, if necessary, shape the motives of a high-performing individual.

With these platforms, we are able to advise clients accordingly on the suitability of an individual for a future role and the development that is required. This also helps us zoom into areas very pertinent to the individual during their coaching sessions.

**SUPERHEROES: IDENTIFIED AND ASSESSED**

Let’s look at the common three scenarios that we find among the high potential candidates and the recommended development plans.

**1. THE INCREDIBLE HULK – HIGH T, LOW M**

The Hulk is indestructible. That makes him almost more powerful than Captain America and Thor. However, he’d rather retreat to Calcutta as Dr Bruce Banner than try to leverage on his strengths, confining himself in his own cave of fear. At times, we have Hulks among our high potentials too. They may be very competent in an area of work but have little interest in putting those skills to use.

It could be someone who shows much talent in public speaking but turns down such opportunities. One may say, “I’m good in analysing data” (T) but “I’m not interested to do so” (M).

Here we see that the motive to perform is not as high as their talent. Looking deeper, there can be a few reasons for this:

• They feel that in their current role, they need to focus on other skills.
• They may have leveraged on these skills previously but saw no benefits to it.
• They may feel that they are not appreciated for their strengths, hence have taken a step back from wanting to do what they are good at.

Hulk’s reasons were clear. He was initially afraid of the unknown if he were to do what they are good at.

ACTION PLAN:

• More important for the coach/mentor to zoom into this and allow the individual to share more about why they have lost interest in their areas of strength.

When someone has no will to perform, often starts with a simple reason of discouragement or lack of support.

Most importantly, look out for hints of derailment or burnout should there be more than one area where the T is higher than the M. At its worse, if the individual is not interested in doing what he is good at, a counsellor can be called in to assess the possibility of depression.

After identifying and removing the obstacle(s) hindering the individual from enjoying what they are good at, it’s also a good opportunity to find out if this individual is in the right job which allows him to maximise his strengths.

**2. IRON MAN – HIGH M, LOW T**

Iron Man may not have super strengths but is very intelligent and displays high-learning agility. He constantly wants more and seeks opportunities to improve himself through his power suit, literally.

Similarly, we have high performers who show a lot of potential but is not quite there yet. The good thing is that they have an eagerness to learn and be better (M), yet they acknowledge that their current skills set (T) is not on par.

**ACTION PLAN:**

For the Iron Man in your organisation, this signals a good opportunity to focus your development on the key areas that they have shown interest.

This is the best time to develop them through experiential learning such as workshops, projects, mentoring, as they are eager to learn. For these high potentials where their M is higher than their T, they probably enjoy the challenges of a steep learning curve with very little help.

However, you may find that there are high potentials in your team who may inherit the egotistic side of Iron Man, i.e. they don’t get along in a team and like to work alone. Although they are very eager to learn, their attitude may get in the way. Try putting aside your frustrations dealing with someone as such.

As a coach/mentor, it helps to highlight the bigger picture of their role in the organisation and what they can improve on.

**3. THOR – T-M ALIGNMENT**

Unlike Hulk and Iron Man, Thor is very much at peace with his powers, is not hesitant to fully leverage on his strengths and is ready to fight when needed.

Thor is more balanced and he seems to have self-awareness of his strengths and limitations.

This is an instance of when one’s skills match his interests – what Peter Saville of Saville Consulting calls a Talent-Motive alignment.

**ACTION PLAN:**

More importantly, when leveraging the Thors, Iron Men and Thors among your midst. This comprehensive talent programme will help you build stronger teams. All the best!

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**By ELISA DASS AVIN**

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“With that idea in mind, Nick Fury formed a strong team of superheroes with Captain America, Iron Man, Hulk, Black Widow and Hawkeye. Though they were remarkable (and imperfect), they were remarkable (and imperfect). Nick had different challenges with each of them. Very much like the Avengers, we often find that an organisation’s high potentials come with their own challenges. Let’s focus on the alignment of talent and motives of an individual and how we can approach it.”

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**IN SUMMARY**

The effectiveness and success of your talent management plans depends on how you are currently addressing and managing the gaps between the motive and talent of your Iron Man and Hulk.

One of the advantages of the Avengers is that they are a combination of different characters, but once they are united in purpose (i.e. saving the world), it brings all their strengths to the forefront and their limitations are covered for by each other.

Similarly, help your pool of high potentials to see a common goal that is beneficial to them and the organisation at large.

So, the next time you plan your talent management or succession plans, be Nick Fury! Be the recruiter of your company’s own team of Avengers by considering these:

• Be transparent in your talent identification process to assess strengths, limitations and aspiration of your super-heroes.

• Put in place measures that can help you assess the talent and motives alignment of each one of them before you plan for their development.

These may help you identify and effectively harness the capabilities of the Hulks, Iron Men and Thors among your midst. This comprehensive talent programme will help you build stronger teams. All the best!

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**Talent Programmes for Hulk, Iron Man and Thor**

By Elisa Dass Avin

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**How would you align talent and motives?**

**ACTION PLAN:**

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When leveraging the Thors, Iron Men and Thors among your midst. This comprehensive talent programme will help you build stronger teams. All the best!

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Elisa Dass Avin pioneered the Leaderonomics Talent Assessment Division and utilises various platforms and tools to ascertain the motive alignment of individuals to help them be at their best. To get in touch with Elisa, email training@leaderonomics.com
By ROSHAN THIRAN
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M Y most favourite superhero of all time is the Amazing Spiderman. Early in his life, he loses both his parents and is adopted by Uncle Ben and Aunt May.

As a young man, Peter Parker goes through a tumultuous time. He is a Grade A "geek." Being skinny and weak, he is constantly bullied by his high school "star" Flash Thompson. Even after Peter is bitten by a radioactive spider and gets superpowers, his pain lingers. His Uncle Ben dies partly due to his lack of "taking responsibility" to stop a crime and later his girlfriend Gwen Stacy's father, New York City Police detective captain George Stacy, is accidentally killed during a battle between Spiderman and Doctor Octopus (Issue #90, Nov. 1970).

Gwen, the love of his life and the one person he truly loves dies too when the Green Goblin throws her off the tower of a bridge (Issue #122, June 1973). What is more painful for Peter is the autopsy of her death concluding that, "It saddens us to say that the whiplash effect she underwent when Spiderman's webbing stopped her so suddenly was, in fact, what killed her". Parker was a man constantly in pain. Yet, in spite of the constant pain and suffering throughout his life, he somehow succeeded in never letting it distract him from his mission and goal in life—helping everyone.

Interestingly, the same scenario plays out with each of the Avengers. In fact, almost every superhero in the Marvel universe went through some form of trauma and suffering before morphing into a mighty being. Captain America had to overcome the death of his buddy "Bucky", whose death he felt personally responsible for. Hawkeye, born Clint Barton, lost his parents at a young age and was in an orphanage for six years before running away. He was beaten and left for dead when he "caught" his mentor The Swordsman embezzling money and later, in his first superhero outing, he was falsely accused of being a criminal. These traumatic moments could easily have swayed Hawkeye, but he persevered and soldiered on.

The Hulk, Natasha Romanoff aka the Black Widow, and Iron Man Tony Stark have different stories but each had numerous traumatic and painful moments in the early part of their lives that defined who they became.

As I read the development of these superheroes, a startling realisation dawns on me—suffering and pain seems to be a pre-requisite for success. Is this the same in real life?

SUFFERING = SUCCESS

As I researched this equation, with little faith of finding research backing this hypothesis, I was surprised to find more than two decades of research from Warwick in England to The University of North Carolina postulating that the majority of trauma survivors report "some degree of positive change." I can attest to this fact too—most of the great influential leaders that I have come across have one commonality—they have gone through much suffering and pain in their lives. And this pain has not in any way detracted them but rather has made them better leaders.

Interestingly, millions of successful people have built "successful enterprises" from the ashes of defeat. Soichiro Honda's workshop and factory was totally destroyed in the war. He rebuilt. Again a bomb destroyed his factory. He built it again. Countless times, bad luck sought him. Yet, each "bad karma" enabled him to rebuild better. Honda never took his pain and suffering as defeat but rather an opportunity to start again.

In the book Leadership Pain, Dr. Sam Chand says, "There is no growth without change, no change without loss, and no loss without pain. Bottom line: if you’re not hurting, you’re not leading." So, is pain a pre-requisite for good leadership?

PAIN & SUFFERING

Why is pain and suffering so powerful in the leadership journey? CS Lewis states, "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is the megaphone to rouse a deaf world." According to Lewis, we get clarity in pain. When in pain, our priorities become clear. We see the world with different lenses. Pain helps us hear our deep convictions.

Leadership usually begins in solitude and reflection. It begins with a clear vision for ourselves. Pain enables us to achieve this state. Wes Furlong, in his article "What makes a leader truly inspiring?" wrote, "It’s the personal narrative behind their leadership that makes the difference. Inspiring leadership is undeniably biographical. Why they lead and “where” they’re going is firmly embedded in what has happened to them. We see the transformation in their lives and the vision that arises from their struggle and find ourselves resonating with their story and joining their journey from what is to what should be."

We may hate to admit it but our painful experiences define us. If you have a conversation with billionaires, they will tell you about the many sleepless nights they had working through issues. All great leaders I have interviewed tell me about their mistakes and the painful interventions they had to take to become the leaders they are today.

And every weekend when I get onto the football pitch, I recount the numerous horrendous training sessions, abuse and corrections from my coaches I went through to get here. The life stories of many successful men and women are showered with painful experiences.

Finally, the word "pain" has its roots in the word "passion." Interestingly, whenever I meet great CEOs and leaders, they all have a sense of passion about what they do and the organisations they lead.

Many CEOs’ passion came from their hope of transcending pain and overcoming suffering. Howard
Schultz’s passion for building Starbuck came from seeing his father’s painful death. Honda’s passion for building was ignited after being rejected by Toyota. You too may find your passion through pain.

EMBRACING PAIN
So, clearly pain is an important component of leadership. My son constantly reminds me, “no pain, no gain.” But the problem is, most of us are hand-wired to avoid pain at all costs.

Pain, suffering, problems and risks are something we run away from not toward. It is much easier to hear about other people’s pain and rejoice in their successes but when it comes to we, we prefer to back down.

It is very natural for all of us to avoid getting hurt. Yet, we cannot get to be a better leader without some body blows. As our natural inclination is to avoid pain, maybe we can learn from The Avengers on how they learnt to embrace pain.

Each of The Avengers, from Black Widow to Captain America had to endure tremendous painful life episodes. Yet, instead of wilting and running away from them, they reframed their beliefs. This helped them believe that pain is good, enabling them to continue their growth process. This belief allowed them to go through more initial painful episodes. Yet, instead of wilting and running away, they reframed their beliefs. Pain is to rewire our beliefs on pain. The starting point of embracing pain is to think about the trials and suffering in your life right now. Are you struggling? Do you feel like backing off and running away from them? That would be the easiest thing to do.

The better thing to do is to reframe your thinking about that. Will you be able to learn lessons from them? Will going through them help make you a better person? Will this turbulent time in your life enable you to be refined as gold is when it is burnt?

If so, fight on and keep embracing the pain. After all, if Spiderman and The Avengers managed to become better superheroes by going through the fires of pain, surely you will become a better leader if you too embrace the joys of suffering. Suffer on!

Roshan Thiran is CEO of Leaderonomics. Although he hated going through painful growth episodes, he is glad he went through them as it has changed him for the better. To connect with Roshan online and get his daily leadership nuggets, log on to www.leaderonomics.com

The SUPERHEROES Leadership Handbook

THE DOS AND DON'TS FROM THE AVENGERS

By SARAH YEE
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SUPERHEROES are amazing people, simply because of the winning combination of their super powers and human values that provides numerous lessons to be learnt by all.

This issue on The Avengers shows us what it’s like to be in the shoes of heroes as they battle not only external monsters, but their internal beasts.

The characters undergo many trials and tribulations in order to achieve their goals and they learn to adapt to difficult situations with their newfound knowledge.

UNABLE TO COMPROMISE
Thor could not reach an agreement with Iron Man and Captain on dealing with Loki as Thor had conflicting views. When they couldn’t reach a consensus and insisted on doing their own way, it resulted in havoc. Therefore, to achieve good results you should put your differences aside to serve the greater good, and always remember to take into account everyone’s opinion before deciding on a course of action that may affect many.

RESORTING TO VIOLENCE
During the very same standoff between Thor, Captain America and Iron Man, Thor’s vehement disagreement with them leads to a full-blown fight. Violence used in disagreements can only lead to more problems. Would you like it if you were slapped in the face simply because you changed a few lines in a document?

Always walk through any disagreements calmly; solutions can be found without resorting to fisticuffs.

LACK OF EMPATHY
Loki’s inability to put himself in the shoes of the heroes led him to believe that the only way for peace was to destroy the Avengers. Even when his faults were made clear, he refused to acknowledge them.

Empathy is something that you must have in order to be an effective leader.

It helps you see things from another person’s point of view and mend your ways before it’s too late.
SUPERHERO DADS
BUILDING CHARACTERS, NURTURING LEADERS

1. FEAR VS RESPECT

From your one-year-old to your teenager, boys who have spent time with you on this path have built a strong foundation for their character, especially for your sons. It's a tricky balance, but with a little guidance and support, you can help them develop the respect they need to become successful and respected leaders.

2. INSTRUCT VS INSPIRE

When teaching your sons, make sure to set clear expectations and inspire them to reach for their goals. It's important to give them the tools they need to succeed, but also to encourage them to pursue their passions and find their own paths.

3. IMPOSE VS INSPIRE

Children need to see that their parents are living a good life, and that they can achieve the same. By showing them your own successes and failures, you can inspire them to work towards their goals and be proud of their own achievements.

4. LOVE VS JUST LOVING

It's important to show your sons love and affection, but it's also important to make sure they understand that love and respect go hand in hand. By instilling this lesson from an early age, you can help them understand the importance of treating others with kindness and respect.

5. TRUTH VS SHAME

When it comes to teaching your sons about their own sexuality, it's important to be honest and open. By avoiding shame and embarrassment, you can help them understand that it's okay to be curious and to ask questions.

6. INNOVATE VS IMPROVE

In today's world, it's important to be innovative and to think outside the box. By encouraging your sons to be creative and to come up with new ideas, you can help them develop the skills they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

BENEFITS OF INSTRUCTING FATHERS

Fathers who take an active role in their children's lives can have a positive impact on their development. By providing guidance, support, and encouragement, you can help your sons develop into strong, confident, and successful adults.

7. TRIBUTE TO APPA, AYAH, DADDY PAPA

To the men in my life:

To my father:

You've always been there for me, through thick and thin. Your love and support have helped me through some of the toughest times in my life. Thank you for being my guide and my rock.

To my mother:

You've been my support system since day one. Your love and care have helped me become the woman I am today. Thank you for always being there for me.

To my partner:

You've been my partner in everything, from the good times to the bad. Thank you for being my constant companion and my best friend.

To my children:

You've been my greatest source of joy. Thank you for bringing so much love and happiness into my life.

Happy Father's Day to all the dads out there!
When he is not roaming through comic and CO hangout bins, Adrian divides his time between managing talent for a local bank, observing and commenting on human behaviour and being a “kaiju” connoisseur. To send feedback to Adrian, email editor@leaderonomics.com

By ADRIAN YAP CHENG KHIN
editor@leaderonomics.com

ULL, the biggest movie has come and gone to the fringes of movie listings by now. The Avengers: Age of Ultron movie almost casually strolled to the US$1.2bil (RM4.7bil) mark in global takings barely 24 days after its initial release, becoming only the third film in history after The Dark Knight and the first Avengers movie, to hit the US$3.0bil mark in the United States 10 days after opening. The numbers and popularity of the franchise is frankly, quite staggering. Why wouldn’t it be, a movie headlined by Hollywood A-listers such as Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Chris Hemsworth and Scarlett Johansson. Featuring fit and buff superheroes and evil maniacal robot tyrants is also an almost bulletproof formula for blockbuster success. It’s easy to dismiss the movie as cinematic fluff, one for little boys and kids, but when examined closely, there’s more meat to it than meets the eye.

Director Joss Whedon has somehow managed to balance the expectations of a huge franchise, along with the introduction of new characters, development of existing characters and lead its 141-minute runtime with enough entertainment to leave you smiling rainbows by the end of it. No mean feat.

There’s plenty of heart and sophistication to its many developing plotlines, and with that, many lessons to take away from as well.

It would almost be cliché to use The Avengers as the basis of a simple study on team dynamics or the essential characters that make an effective team (having a chiselled-jaw Norse God on your side does give you certain advantages). Instead we are going to shine the spotlight on the other character that make up the film’s title – the manically charming robot baddie Ultron, brought to life by the velvety-voiced James Spader.

SPOLIER ALERT
Proceed with caution if you haven’t watched the movie but intend to do so in the future as the rest of the article will come with its fair share of spoilers.

Granted it would be safe to assume that everyone expects Ultron, the big bad guy to bite proper dust by the end of the movie. This is after all a superhero movie based on a comic. You have to check some of the more humbling expects of reality at the door.

So, whatever we are going to learn from him is basically what you should NOT do as a leader of an organisation, given that he did not lead his band of robot clones to success.

1. DIVERSITY IS NOT A BAD WORD
Ultron may have amassed a sizeable army to battle the Avengers in the movie, but they were just mindless clones of himself who offered little variations in strategy and whose only strength appeared to be numbers.

As leaders, we must not be afraid to build teams consisting of members who are diverse, not just among themselves, but also from you.

It’s easy and comfortable for a leader to build a team around characters who share similar personalities and backgrounds with them. After all, you can at least ensure that decision-making meetings will be short and no idea of yours would be greeted with anything less than enthusiasm.

But teams that lack diversity will likely result in a team lacking in imagination and potentially, efficiency. Imagine having a hand with five thumbs and you’ll get the idea.

2. DON’T BE TOO EMOTIONAL
For a robot, Ultron was inexplicably a huge sack of emotions. His sophisticated artificial intelligence came with a set of problems, namely the ability to feel. He allowed his emotions to get the better of him, in particular his senseless hatred of the Avengers and the humans they were to protect, resulting in poor decision-making and ultimately his downfall.

As leaders, it’s crucial to remain objective and sensible at all times. Being too emotional about something with regard to your organisation can cloud your objectivity about that very thing, which will result in negative consequences.

Plus, no one respects a leader who is emotionally volatile and appears to struggle to keep their attitudes in check.

People naturally gravitate towards leaders who can make objective and sound decisions and who can steady the ship through troubled waters.

Don’t mistake being emotional with being passionate; they are really not the same thing.

3. BEING AMBITIOUS TOO QUICKLY CAN BE DANGEROUS
If Ultron had decided to execute his nefarious plan of ridding the human race in stages, who knows, he may have succeeded.

Instead he decided to go for the jugular with his first strike, namely lifting the fictional nation of Sokovia up into the sky and dropping it down with a bang, supposedly resulting in an extinction-level event. Such a brazen plan was easily discovered by the heroes, who naturally foiled it and saved the day.

There’s nothing wrong with being ambitious as leaders. After all, Steve Jobs didn’t create the iPod by telling himself that he just wanted to work with what’s already out there.

But being too ambitious without proper cost-calculations and thought can result in an extinction-level event, for your organisation that is.

4. CASCADE YOUR VISION CLEARLY
The key reason for Ultron’s downfall in the final act of the movie was the defection of the Maximoff twins, Wanda and Pietro, from his side to the Avengers.

As much as the twins hate Tony Stark, it somehow doesn’t quite cut the mustard that their hatred would drive them to side a maniacal robot that intends to end their species. Maybe Ultron intentionally decided not to tell them, or maybe it slipped his mind.

The point is a leader of any organisation would never be able to lead his or her team to success if they do not clearly tell them what that “success” would be.

If you consider yourself to be a good leader, then you would have a vision on how you want to run your team, department, organisation, etc – you need to clearly cascade that vision down to your team.

Failure to do so would result in a team pulling in different directions, ultimately leading each other to failure, simply because no one person was pulling towards the same direction.

As a leader, it is your duty to make your team understand what your vision is, and to manage them towards it.

You don’t have to strike with a bang to signal your ambition. Ambition can be something you unfold slowly over a period of time based on solid planning and effective goal-setting.
By LILY CHEAH
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**WARNING:** This article contains spoilers for season one and two of Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. and Avengers: Age of Ultron.

Television series Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. is perhaps the lesser known little brother in the Marvel universe. Next to the Avengers movie franchise, armed with a mega budget for Hollywood stars and an alien-load of special effects, Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. is, in contrast, far humbler. No over-the-top explosions and large-scale destruction here.

That said, fellow fans of the series will applaud its intriguing storyline (which began very slowly in season one at the end of 2013, but improved exponentially thereafter, I promise) and charming characters. The series follows a team of agents from S.H.I.E.L.D. (Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division) under the leadership of Phil Coulson (played by Clark Gregg), who also appeared in the first Avengers film.

After Nick Fury takes his death in Captain America: The Winter Soldier, timed toward the end of season one of Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. Fury appoints Coulson as the new S.H.I.E.L.D. director.

A down-to-earth character who wears his heart on his sleeve, Coulson gives no air of mystery like Fury. Through seasons one and two, both before his promotion and after it, viewers get to know a man who deeply cares for his team, and for all that S.H.I.E.L.D. stands for.

In Fury’s eyes, there was no other person he would rather have replace him. “There’s no one else I trust with this,” Fury informs Coulson in his brief appearance in episode 22 of season one.

**THE UP’S AND THE DOWN’S OF LEADING**

Fortunately, scriptwriters don’t fuck Coulson’s personal struggles and journey of leading S.H.I.E.L.D. neatly behind the action and drama of a crumbling S.H.I.E.L.D. and the aggression of HYDRA and Inhumans. Coulson’s worries are given screen time to make them-selves known, as are his triumphs. And admirably (for a show about super-powered beings, science geniuses and highly-skilled plus-highly-good-looking fighters), his journey is very human, and very relatable.

I wouldn’t call these “lessons”. They’re more aptly termed “observations” made of the journey of an individual in a position of leadership, with the desire to do the best he can.

It also doesn’t hurt that they apply even in our non-Marvel world.

**#1 A position of leadership is a vulnerable place**

Along with the directorship of the entire S.H.I.E.L.D. comes power (and yes, responsibility), but also, vulnerability. Coulson’s leadership ability is intensely scrutinized by his team and members of S.H.I.E.L.D. network after he rises to the position of director. Is he capable? Is he sane? Why is he so transfixed on finding the Puerto Rican alien city? Is he alien? Of course, it doesn’t help that Fury had injected alien blood (specifically, Kree) into Coulson to revive him from the dead (you didn’t forget that Coulson died in the first Avengers movie, did you?)

Coulson isn’t immune to these credibility jobs. He doubts himself and even thinks himself crazy at one point. Add to this the fact he must rebuild a broken S.H.I.E.L.D. with limited resources, and we observe a man who truly, at many points, just has to take it a day at a time.

**#2 Building and maintaining trust is not easy**

Despite being under scrutiny, and unsure himself of the effects of the Kree blood that resurrected him, Coulson still has to continue the operations of S.H.I.E.L.D. and build trust within his new, much larger team. One big camp of sceptics is led by Agent Robert Gonzales, who distrusts Coulson to the point where he and his team on S.H.I.E.L.D. aircraft carrier “liar” dub themselves “the real S.H.I.E.L.D.”. Talk about a covert rebellion.

Of course, as director, there are also secrets he cannot disclose, and Coulson fully bears the consequences of the tension this creates even with his close friend, Agent Melinda May (played by Ming-Na Wen).

**#3 No one can plan away unexpected circumstances**

Even if decisions are weighed out and made with the best of intentions, nothing guarantees a smooth ride. Coulson’s decision to go into the alien city in Puerto Rico ultimately results in the death of Agent Antoine Tripplett. And allowing Agent Gonzales to visit Jia Ying, the leader of the Inhumans, instead of himself, in an attempt to build trust with the “real S.H.I.E.L.D.”, it sparks off a war. Plus, who could have guessed that Agent Grant Ward, a core member of Coulson’s team in season one, was part of HYDRA? True, from the audience’s perspective, it was one of the most exciting developments of the series. But from the team’s perspective, it was crushing.

**#4 Despite it all, having a team willing to run with you is remarkably fulfilling**

Through it all, Coulson still commits to always doing his best for S.H.I.E.L.D. and his team. This devotion and integrity ultimately keeps Coulson’s team with him through every season.

Even Agent May recuperates from her anger at being kept in the dark about Theta Protocol (which by the way, was the large ship Fury used to save the residents of Sokovia in The Avengers: Age of Ultron).

The final episode of season two aired on May 12, and though it presented a few shockers that will undoubtedly fuel the plot for season three, we do see Coulson’s team back together, and Hydra and Jia Ying defeated. For now at least.

Having seen how Coulson’s character has grown through both seasons, and his consistent demonstration of admirable leadership, it is a satisfying ending to see his team by his hand, with their trust placed in him no matter how unconventional his tactics, and no matter how alien his blood may be.

**Ward:** I thought we were rebuilding trust, Coulson. I can help you.

**Coulson:** My team… You think… You are not part nor will you ever be on my team. You dropped Fitz-Simmons out of a plane. You betrayed every one of us. (Season two, episode two)

**May:** All those overseas trips you were taking. They were never about recruiting new agents were they? You want to tell me what Theta Protocol is? **Coulson:** No. **May:** Because you don’t trust me. **Coulson:** Because you’re not the director of S.H.I.E.L.D. **May:** Neither are you. (Season two, episode 19)

**Coulson:** That works, too. (Season one, episode 22)

By Lily Cheah
BLACK WIDOWS AND HAWKEYES IN OUR MIDST

**Why do we need them when they are just mere mortals?**

By DINESH THU RAMACHANDRAN
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In The Avengers (2012), Black Widow never loses focus of her primary objective which was to put an end to Loki’s plans despite Hawkeye, whom she shares an emotional bond with, being under Loki’s control. Instead of giving in to her emotions and seeing herself as a pawn to the situation at hand, she utilises her emotions to outwit Loki into divulging his intentions.

It is not uncommon for life to throw us a curveball when we least expect it. This is especially evident in today’s business world where we are all linked to each other in one way or another. Indeed, within an organisation, your team may feel the ripple effects of an unforeseen situation, your team may feel the requisite to engage in fraudulent activities to avoid the detrimental of others. Regardless of the work at hand, he will only give it his best and nothing less.

**1. KEEPING EMOTIONS FROM THE EQUATION**

In The Avengers (2012), Black Widow

**2. PLAYING TO ONE’S STRENGTHS**

Hawkeye is noted for his impressive marksmanship skills, particularly with his bow and unique set of customised arrows.

In Thor (2011) and The Avengers, he is seen to be perched on higher ground. This is because he is aware that it is only on higher ground that he is able to utilise his marksmanship and acute observation skills to the fullest, thus providing his team with better support.

It is always good to have a self-aware individual in an organisation. Self-awareness can turn good into great.

By being aware of his strengths and weaknesses, the Hawkeye in your team can leverage on his strengths by choosing his moves more wisely and deliberately.

This would allow him to hold his own even if he is amongst people who, at a first glance, seem to out-class him in all aspects. So, always ensure that your team comprises people from various backgrounds to allow for better solutions to any given issue.

**3. KNOWING WHEN TO PULL THE PLUG**

In Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014), it was revealed that S.H.I.E.L.D. had been compromised, in which its ranks were infiltrated by Hydra personnel.

Black Widow, being a loyal agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. for many years, had to make the difficult decision to help Captain America bring down the organisation that was intent on doing harm to the people of Earth.

At times, the organisation which we serve may deviate from its original purpose. Even worse, it may tread on the slippery slope of moral compromise to achieve its objective, even if it means that others would be negatively affected. The case of Enron comes to mind where the company, in the pursuit of its objectives, was willing to engage in fraudulent activities to the detriment of others.

If not for the efforts of Sherron Watkins who stood up as a whistle-blower, the wrongdoings could have gone undetected. With a Black Widow in your organisation, you can be assured that your team will not engage in any activities that go against good values and integrity; for she will be willing to expose the team even if it comes at a personal cost.

**4. FOCUSING ON THE END GOAL**

Hawkeye, in the latest installment of the Avengers, utters a memorable line, “... if you step out that door, you are an Avenger.”

Later, he is shown to be willing to sacrifice himself in an attempt to protect a child though it meant that he would be unable to return to his own family. This shows that he truly believes in what the Avengers stand for.

In an organisational context, there are moments in which we are tempted to take the easy path instead of the right path as the latter would surely be a long and arduous journey.

A Hawkeye in your team would not see his actions as being that of an individual. Instead, he would see the bigger picture of his actions to be one that represents the ideals of the team and the organisation.

Regardless of the work at hand, he will only give it his best and nothing less.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Although it is unlikely that any of us would ever have the capabilities of the Avengers, it is possible for us to relate to Black Widow and Hawkeye, who are the only two mere mortals in the team.

Perhaps this is why they were included in the team in the first place, to remind us that even ordinary individuals have the potential to shape the world for the better.

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Dinesh believes that everyone is a potential game-changer. If only we have the courage to keep to our path and persevere through adversity. To engage with Dinesh, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com. Visit www.leaderonomics.com for more leadership content.
**A MODERN-DAY SUPERHERO’S TOOLKIT FOR SUCCESS**

**HAVING SUPERPOWERS IS ONE THING, KNOWING WHEN TO USE THEM IS EVERYTHING**

**THE ABILITY TO TAKE CRITICISM**

If you’re seeking success in life, you are inevitably going to draw criticism – a lot of it. It is going to come from all kinds of sources and it won’t always be fair.

When many people receive criticism, they internally process it along the lines of saying “Wow, I’m bad and I need to become good”. A loop of negative thinking begins and emotions are in turmoil, especially if you have been singled out in front of other people.

The truth is, though, that feedback is a gift. You can always learn something from it, whether or not it was deserved and no matter who gave it.

The approach you must cultivate is to think “OK, I’ve done pretty well so far, and I clearly have further to go.”

Taking feedback on board and learning from it is the most powerful tool in your arsenal for success. Always be grateful for it and treat it as an opportunity to get better.

Whenever you’re receiving too much criticism, just remember one thing: When you were born all you knew was how to eat, cry, sleep and poop. And look how far you’ve come since then! Surely there’s more ahead.

**USING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

You already know some emotionally intelligent people. They are the ones who make you feel heard and respected even when they disagree with you.

They are decisive in an emergency but consultative elsewhere, even if they already know the answer.

You would follow them anywhere because you know credit for success will be shared liberally and blame for failures will rest on their shoulders.

There are no hard and fast rules to getting better at this. It’s accepted by all researchers into emotional intelligence (EQ) that it is a “learned” behaviour, but some people are naturally better at different things.

Start by increasing your awareness of your own feelings. Writing down the best and worst parts of your day and how people made you feel is a great first step.

You’ll be surprised how much you will learn about yourself and how you can do things differently just like that! Apart from that, finding a mentor who you think has high EQ will help a lot and doing some reading on the topic will make a big difference.

Do not underestimate the power of this tool and beware: developing emotional intelligence is a steep uphill climb.

**HAVING CREDENTIALS**

Have you ever been in a meeting, made a suggestion and been ignored? That feels pretty bad. But what’s worse is when someone else suggests the same thing and everybody starts nodding in agreement!

What exactly is it that made people ignore you and listen to them? The answer iscredibility.

Credibility takes time to build, and it comes from having “been there and done that”.

Credibility needs a source. If you are young or have just changed industries, your experiences won’t count for much, no matter how much you’ve done.

If you do have an idea you really think will gain traction, try asking someone who does have credibility for their time and explaining the idea to them, seeking their advice.

This could lead to them supporting the idea and they will lend you some credibility to explain it to others.

Until then, you may have to sit on a good idea until the time is right, because speaking up too early can, unfortunately, hurt more than it helps.

Once you have some credibility of your own, it will grow quickly.

**USING YOUR MORAL COMPASS**

Behaving ethically can be difficult at times, because everyone’s moral compass is a little different.

Many films and stories have examples of someone doing the wrong thing for the right reasons, and this is when following ethics becomes hard.

Sometimes doing the right thing means breaking the rules, and sometimes following the rules is the wrong thing to do.

If you’re in a pinch, apply the 60 minutes test. 60 minutes is an American current affairs programme where business leaders and politicians are grilled for their choices and actions.

If you feel you would be comfortable going on 60 minutes and explaining your actions to the nation, you are probably doing the right thing.

If you wouldn’t, it’s time to ask more questions and guide others onto a better path.

**GIVING FEEDBACK**

It’s very easy to criticise. Every idea has holes and every person we know makes mistakes on a daily basis, and yet if you give feedback correctly, people will thank you for pointing out the flaws in their plans.

To develop this superpower, the first and most important thing to do is to put yourself in the shoes of the person you’re giving feedback to.

Understand what they’re thinking and speak to that.

Better yet, try asking questions instead of just telling them what’s wrong.

Start with “What are you aiming to achieve here?” and slowly work down to the problem.

The person will feel they’ve found the issue on their own, they’ll be grateful to you for helping them find it, and your hammer never needs to be swung!

**IN CONCLUSION**

Heroes are heroes not just because of what they do, but because of what they don’t do. Having superpowers is one thing, knowing when to use them is everything.

Knowing when to hold back, when to dive in, when to deflect and when to strike are all parts of success in business and life, so develop your superpowers and use them wisely!

Christopher is an Australian finance professional living in Malaysia who wishes he had the power to eat nasi lemak every day without gaining weight. If you would like to get in touch with Christopher, email editor@leaderonomics.com.
WE KNOW THAT GOOD TEAMWORK GETS THE JOB DONE, WHY THEN ARE WE HELL-BENT ON SHOWCASING OUR DIFFERENCES?

By DANIEL LEE
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Most of us have our ideal vision of a "perfect team" and expect our team to be a well-oiled machine from the start. Choosing the right people for your team is important but the reality is, most of the time we are put in a team that we didn’t choose, with individuals who are very different from ourselves.

Earlier this month, I worked as a facilitator for the DIODE Youth Leadership Camp (YLC), a six-day programme for youths aged 14 to 16. These youths came from different social and economic backgrounds, each with their own personalities and leadership styles.

I can tell you that things don’t come easy when people with diverse interests are required to work together to accomplish a common goal. It takes courage to be able to work with new people and learn how to utilise the different strengths of each team member to work towards a common goal.

It’s okay to have disagreements in a team

In his groundbreaking 1965 article, psychologist Bruce Tuckman described what he coined the "storming" phase – a situation that occurs when individuals with different leadership styles and personalities are put together, causing misunderstandings and disagreements to arise.

In one of the group discussions, two members of the group I was facilitating misunderstood each other, resulting in a quarrel. As a facilitator, I did not see that incident as something negative. Instead, I saw it as an opportunity for the team to learn about respect, communication and moving forward together as one. It is crucial that teams learn to deal with disagreements and communicate with one another.

In one of our camp sessions called "Chatz with DIODE," we asked campers to discuss and share their individual take on certain issues. After everyone had a chance to say their piece, each team would work towards making a group decision.

Although certain members of a group had differing views, the team still needed to learn about communicating to one another with respect and to move forward as a team by putting aside their differences.

Everyone plays a significant role

Vision is very important in any team. Without vision, a well-oiled team would have no real purpose to work towards. In the DIODE module, we have something called the AVP map.

The AVP map is a foundation for learning that represents

A FOR AWARENESS
V FOR VISION
P FOR PLAN.

We believe that in the science of building leaders, there has to be vision. Vision would mean a goal, purpose or direction that the team has to focus on. It is very important that the team sets a vision that they believe in.

As Friedrich Nietzsche said, “He who has a why to live for, can bear almost any how.” The stronger the vision is for the team, the more focused and determined the group will be when facing challenges.

Everyone has a no-brainer

To many, it’s a no-brainer. To many, it’s a no-brainer. To many, it’s a no-brainer.

As Friedrich Nietzsche said, “He who has a why to live for, can bear almost any how.” The stronger the vision is for the team, the more focused and determined the group will be when facing challenges.

Everyone plays a significant role

We have to realise, however, that everyone is crucial to the team. A team comprises individuals with different strengths and weaknesses. In order to move forward effectively, every member has to be confident and know that their roles are significant.

All we need to do is to find a role that suits our strengths and the team’s needs. What we perceive as an insignificant role may be the only thing that keeps the team running well.

Many times, we develop a sense of fear because of past experiences of working in a team. Some of us may be intimidated by the very thought of working in a team with different people. However, in order to grow as a leader and as an individual, we have to step out of our comfort zones.

If you are working in a team now or in the future, know that it won’t be an easy journey but definitely a worthwhile one.

Team stands for TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE.

Daniel Lee works with the Leaderonomics Youth team. Born with brittle bones, he doesn’t allow his disability to stop him. He is a wheelchair marathoner, sitting volleyball player and a person dedicated to nurturing leaders of the future. He believes it’s not how you start, but how you persevere throughout and finish a race that counts the most. To engage with Daniel, email editor@leaderonomics.com