TRUE VALUE OF SKILLED TRADES

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KAREN NEOH

ENGINES OF GROWTH

IT has always bothered me knowing that people are not appreciated for the work they do because it was not “mainstream” (or in my grumpy young mind “flourish” enough). I made it a point to, for example, always hang out with the maintenance and engineering staff at the hospital I worked with – or at least randomly say THANK YOU to them for making sure everything worked well.

Too often, teams that work backstage orchestrating the smooth-running of organisations are literally not visible. Or called in only when disaster strikes. The M&E guys found me funny, but the twinkle in their eyes told me they appreciated being appreciated.

My father taught us to always respect anyone who earns an honest living. He must have somehow been the inspiration for shows like Mike Rowe’s Dirty Jobs and Somebody’s Gotta Do it – which in turn have been the inspiration for this issue.

And when I am not wavering between being utterly perplexed by a machine and dancing for joy for fixing it, I think about how inefficient it is for the kids of young people to avoid a career path that has traditionally been perceived in a negative light.

Even though that may precisely be where their passion lies, and as many have pointed out in this issue, yield better financial prospects too. Mitch Ditkoff draws the line in the sand and says without reservation that the choice is ours – and that we need to listen to our own gut instinct to decide.

But first, we take a macro view of countries who recognise that the global skills gap in skilled trades will have a significant impact on their economies if not addressed, as well as the success stories where vocational training and career options are highly respected by society. Then we zoom down to – you yes, me and everyone around us – and what role we might play to reverse the imbalance that has been brought about by misconceptions and, perhaps, the fear of the unknown.

As a sanity check, we really wanted to hear from the horses’ mouths – our intrepid interns Jasmine Chuah and Sara Yee by particularly being passionate enough.

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

KAREN NEOH
Editor leaderonomics.com

EDITORIAL

Contributing editors
PREMA JAYABALAN
NIVA TH
LEELAY HUSAIN

Sub-editor LEE KAYEAN

Lund & Design
TUNE ENG AMMA
ZHAIHAR BAHARUDIN
ADU ABDUH
HAFIZ RODA

Writings & Content:
NINATI DORFORD
SAHID YEE
JASMINE CHUAN

EDITOR

ROSHAN THIRAN
Editor KAREN NEOH

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**TRUE VALUE OF SKILLED TRADES**

**MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION**

By KAREN NEOH

karen.neoh@leaderonomics.com

M y father was a bit of a grease monkey (I say this with great pride!). Growing up, he loved cars and wanted to become a mechanic—went off to school and graduated a mechanical engineer—with an “any and everything can be fixed” conviction. While he didn’t become a mechanic, my Pa did use his training to run a milk factory very much hands-on and not from behind a desk. It taught us to respect anyone who earned an honest living—and till today, I “practice” the skills he has imparted (in addition to holding the flashlight for him to fix the car/link/appliance) minor plumbing, hooking up our hodge-podge collection of audio equipment, assembling all IKEA furniture with such gusto I should volunteer to ride around with the yellow delivery truck, and the like.

Inspired by my father and Mike Rowe, who would both go out of their way to champion the hardworking unsung heroes, we take a good look at careers in the skilled trades—including those in:
- industrial trades (e.g., electricians, plumbers, machinists, tailors, and die-makers)
- construction trades (brick masons, carpenters, tile setters, electricians, painters, installers)
- service trades (e.g., paramedics, medical assistants, chefs, hairdressers).

The intention really was to understand how the perception and value placed on careers in the skilled trades differ from country to country.

The reality is that, even though there is a shortage of people with such skills and a recognition that such trades are increasingly in need of employees with professional training and vocational skills (Skills beyond school: synthesis report, OECD reviews of vocational education and training), the perception of taking up vocational training still takes a backseat to getting a university degree—whether it is in Malaysia or America, the United Kingdom (UK), or Canada.

**WHERE WE ARE HEADING**

**MALAYSIA**

The report: Education for Sustainable Development: Promoting Technical Education and Vocational Training (UNICEF)

- in 2008, the Ministry of Human Resources reported a labour shortage of over 700,000 skilled workers (manufacturing, agriculture and construction industries).
- by 2020, an expected 3.8mil jobs will be created (where 46% will require vocational certificates or diplomas). An estimated that 50,000 additional places need to be created in vocational education each year.

**UNUNITED KINGDOM (UK)**

According to a report by KPMG and the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI)

- The construction industry is suffering from a severe shortage of almost all skilled people.
- 20% more construction managers, surveyors, electricians and other trades will be needed to meet demand, over the next four years (than previously).
- The skills shortage crisis would only be addressed if industries, unions, government and educators collaborated.
- Most organisations agree that more could be done to remove the stigma attached to vocational subjects in schools, colleges and universities.

**SOUTH KOREA**

The CIEB recognises the achievements of South Korea. Ingredients for success:
- Lifelong education is defined as any form of education outside of traditional schooling including para-school (e.g., night classes, distance universities, industry-attatched schools), occupational or technical general or liberal.
- The government has a credit bank system which allows people without degrees and national analyses have identified a common ingredient for success—without which the best VET strategies might fall victim to the adage “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.”

The government is developing a record and qualification framework for lifelong learning programmes—an online career management system to record workers’ learning experiences, providing information to employers based on uniform standards.

**SWITZERLAND**

Recognised as the Gold Standard by CIEB, the Swiss vocational education and training (VET) system is said to be an important contributor to the nation’s economy.

In Switzerland, 70% of youth participate in the VET system, a system highly respected by the people.

Ingredients for success:
- Prepares students—including high achievers—for a range of careers (e.g., IT, advanced manufacturing, healthcare, as well as traditional trades and crafts).
- Seamlessly connects young people with careers in white-collar and blue-collar jobs through a robust apprenticeship system.

**GERMANY**

Germany is another country that others look to for best practices. Ingredients for success:
- VET is deeply embedded and widely respected in German society.
- A dual system integrates work and school-based learning to prepare apprentices for a successful transition to full-time employment.
- High degree of engagement and ownership by employers and other social partners.
- VET system is well-resourced, drawing on public and private funding.

**TAKING THE LEAD**

All said and done, the global and national analyses have identified a common ingredient for success—without which the best VET strategies might fall victim to the adage “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.”

Public perception, acceptance and respect for lifelong learning, which includes all education outside of traditional schooling, requires policy changes to take place—but more importantly, leaders—be it in schools, communities, families and companies—have a role to play.

We must all recognise that the value of a person’s work does not lie in the qualifications he or she possesses, but how a life of learning is applied in the real world and how he or she contributes to the progress and wellbeing of the community.

So, ask you, our treasured readers, the question I ask myself periodically to keep me true to my life purpose: “How do you define success? And what role can we play in guiding people to their true calling?”

**UNITED STATES (US)**

“...the baby-boom workers are retiring and leaving lots of openings for millennials.”—Anthony Carnevale, Georgetown University

Economists highlight the millions of jobs in the skilled trades, some of which pay better than what the average college graduate makes.

Proposals include that nearly one-third of job vacancies will require some post-secondary qualification (but not a university degree) in 2018.

Path to learning a skilled trade can cost significantly less.

**CANADA**

Canadian Employment Minister Jason Kenney cautioned that the shortage of skilled workers could jeopardise Canada’s economic growth.

Canada can also expect baby-boomers (30% of the skilled trade workers) to soon retire, taking with them a lifetime of knowledge and skill.

Skills shortages are exacerbated by the inability to attract youth into the trades.

Source: Canadian Business

**HOW DO THEY DO IT?**

In trying to understand the critical success factors of an effective vocational education strategy, Kenney looks to Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Denmark, where he notes that about two-thirds of high-school students (aged 16) enrol in paid apprenticeship programs, half at 19 “unencumbered by debt”—with a certificate that is accepted as having the same social and economic value as a university degree (Canadian Business).

While various national and international bodies like the OECD have stepped up to find a solution to a skills gap that will have a significant impact on economies—providing policy recommendations—my question is: What can we do ourselves to find a solution?

**PERCEPTION**

Across the board, countries appear to grapple with similar issues; that vocational training and careers are regarded as not being first choice.

In addition to the infrastructural and policy changes recommended, the Center on International Education Benchmarking (CIEB) underlines the need for creating a brand that makes vocational education an attractive opportunity to young people.

To read more about the characteristics of a world class VET system, and the OECD policy recommendations, do go to www.leaderonomics.com

**PREDICATES SCENE**

After my father retired from his milk factory, he continued learning and applying his skills to figure out how software and hardware work. And in an era where the older generation resisted change and wrote memos on memo pads as opposed to sending email—my Pa became the go-to guy for computer repair for all our friends and family. He morphed himself but in a way kept true to his dream to be a mechanic, fixing instead the machines of the day.

Karen stands by her childhood conviction to save the world—that being the vision, the actions we have morphed appropriately over the years. Imagine her Pa making things right for all manner of things needing fixing. ‘If only we were alive today, we still have all his tools. For leadership content, do visit www.leaderonomics.com
By MITCH DITKOFF
editor@leadersonomics.com

THERE is a moment in everyone’s life when all the cards are on the table, all the chips, too—the moment of truth when the entire universe, it seems, is conspiring to call one’s attention to the choice we have every single day to let go of the past and move towards what is truly calling us, even if we have no idea where it will lead.

One such moment happened for me in 1969, during my first and only semester as a graduate student at Brown University’s prestigious MFA Creative Writing Programme.

Like most long-haired, Vietnam-phobic students whose depression-imprinted parents would have much preferred him to have chosen law, medicine or the Talmud over poetry, I found myself, at the ripe old age of 22, sleeping 12 hours a day and posting my newly minted poems on trees at midnight.

I was feverishly reading Rilke, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams just in case the conversation turned in that direction with any number of my far more well-read poetry professors engaging me in exoteric literary conversations at any number of ultra-high faculty parties I kept getting invited to.

SORRY SOIRÉE

This is the kind of heady gatherings where Kurt Vonnegut and other traveling bands kept showing up, laugh lines around their eyes unable to mask a lifetime’s worth of sadness and despair.

It was at one of these high octave Ivy League literary soirées one autumn night, emboldened by whatever intoxicants I could get my hands on, that I was over- taken by a single question rising from my loins—the kind of question that, if unspoken, the rest of my life would not only be a pitiful charade, but everything I ended up writing would, at best, be little more than a clever overcompensation for my silence.

Approaching my first professor, large glass of wine in my right hand, I let it fly: “If you could be anywhere in the world, at this precise moment in time, kind sir, where would you be?”

“Hmmmm...” my professor replied, dramatically pausing just in case a beautiful co-ed was standing nearby. “Excellent question, indeed! Let me see... if I could be anywhere in the world at this precise moment in time where would it be? Well... that would be... Baja California. Definitely Baja California. Feels like home to me.”

Nodding appreciatively and doing my bearded graduate student best not to bump into anyone as I crossed the now tilting room, I sought out my second professor, an unhappily married, hammock- belied man.

“Guatemala!” he blurted, without hesitation. “Definitely Guatemala, especially that sweet, little village 30 miles out the capital city. Love that place!”

Fueled as I was by what was now emerging as a definable pattern of response, I quickly found my way to the bar where Professor #3 was holding court, large humous stain on his too small polyester shirt.

“Hmmm... where would I be if I could be anywhere in the world?” he repeated. “Easy! The Pacific Northwest. The rain! The fog! What a fabulous place to write. You really need to visit sometime, Mitch.”

As I walked away, 22-year-old knowing the last of the lot, Professor #4, it began to dawn on me that none of my so-called mentors wanted to be where they were! All of them wanted to be somewhere else—a better place, a different place, a more exotic place, but definitely not where we were standing.

And here I was, aspiring to be just like them—published, tenured, and respected—when 20 years later some graduate student would ask me where I wanted to be and my answer would be somewhere else.

Doh! Why not leave now while I still could? I slept well that night and the next night, too, fully rested for my Monday morning class, the one Professor #1 began by calling my name, noting with tenured gravitas that he wanted to see me immediately after class, a request that could indicate only one thing—the jig was up.

I, Mr.-Attempt-to-Outstare-My-Professors-So-They-Would-Think-I-Knew-More-Than-I-Did, was about to be summarily kicked out of school, overwhelmed as my teachers were by the spotty quality of my work and the insidious ways in which Lawrence Ferlinghetti kept leaking into my writing. Not to mention the fact that I still had no clue what the big deal was about Wallace Stevens.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

“Mr. Ditkoff,” Professor #3 intoned as the class emptied out, “the faculty and I... have... after reviewing your work very carefully... decided to give you a full teaching scholarship.”


“Quit?” he replied. “You can’t quit. Don’t you realise what you’re being given here—a full teaching scholarship—an absolutely free education at one of the best graduate schools in the world.”

“I-Ching” said, sir. “I quit. My education needs to happen somewhere else.”

Which is exactly what happened. Two days later I was gone. Two weeks later I was living where I really want to live—Cambridge, Massachusetts, and doing what I really wanted to do—being a night desk clerk at a second rate hotel—working the midnight shift—with plenty of time to live the poetry of life, not force myself to write about it.

SO WHAT?

While I’m open to the possibility that “the world is my oyster”, sometimes, at least for me, grilled cheese is more in order... or, better yet, fasting. Just because the world is dangling a shiny object in front of us doesn’t necessarily mean we should grab it. No one knows for sure whether that shiny object is “right”, “wrong”, “grace” or “temptation”.

In the end, it all comes down to gut feel and our own sense of what’s calling us. You can throw the I-Ching all you want, ask your closest friends for their sage counsel and convene focus groups until you’re blue in the face, but ultimately it all comes down to you and your innate ability to tap into the essence of what it is that moves you. When you trust that, all doors begin opening up.

WHAT IS YOUR “POETRY OF LIFE” CHOICE AT THIS MOMENT?

What is your “poetry of life” choice at this moment? What crossroads are you standing at? What decision is up for you these days? And what, if anything, can you do to increase your odds of making the choice that will have the best possible outcome for you?
SKILLED TRADES

CAREER IN A SKILLED TRADE?

Thoughts and Views of Some Straight-Talking Youth and a Practitioner

By SARA YEE and JASMINE CHUAH
editor@leaderonomics.com

SKILLED trades can be loosely defined as “skills that involve one of the following four categories: construction, transportation, manufacturing and service.”

These trades are occupations that require a set of abilities that usually involve physical handwork. Plenty of what you see around you is the work of people in skilled trades.

Not only do they require physical hardwork, but a lot of training and knowledge is needed by people working in these fields.

Plenty of times, it is highly specialised, which means only trained personnel are qualified to take on these jobs. Some skilled trades include culinary arts, sewing, technical repair and so on.

To further define it in a Malaysian context, skilled trades are jobs that usually require, but are not limited to, vocational skills. The system in Malaysia is generally inclined towards the academic sphere. You go from school to (maybe) college, to university and then onto a job (usually in the corporate world).

Oftentimes, kids who are not as academically inclined are packed up and sent out of the system to vocational schools, where they learn skills which they can then turn into jobs.

Here is an extremely generalised illustration of the shaping of the typical Malaysian's perception towards the skilled trades. Ever had the ambition of becoming a plumber? What about a seamstress? No? Ever wondered why?

We caught up with young Malaysians to find out about their take on the skilled trades industry and why?

Q: Would you willingly enter the skilled trades industry and why?

Yes, I would, because I’d be happy doing something that I enjoy and which I am skilled at. At the same time, because I am skilled at it, my work will be easier. Also, because I have had the necessary training, I won’t encounter that many problems while doing my work.

Nur Adyana Natasha
Student

Q: Would you willingly enter into the skilled trades industry and why?

Yes, why not? I am happy when I cook and I believe that if people like my skill, I should improve on it.

Alicia Chua
Student

Q: Would you willingly enter into the skilled trades industry and why?

Actually, I probably wouldn’t pursue a skilled trade as a career. I would consider studying one. With the reality of the situation these days with economic crises, we must be prepared for job instability. Skilled trade jobs have projected increases in opportunity over the next two decades and it would be worth studying one of these trades for security purposes. It seems that there will always be a need for skilled trade jobs in comparison with jobs in the corporate world. I also think it would be useful in terms of saving money because I will be able to fix things without hiring someone else to do them.

Venus Lim
Designer

Q: Would your parents agree with this?

Yes, why not? I am happy when I cook and I believe that if people like my skill, I should improve on it.

Alicia Chua
Student

Q: Would your parents agree with this?

I think they will, because they are supportive and also believe that I should at least try first, and if I fail, they’ll help to pick me up and put me back on my feet. And they know that I’ll be able to bake pastries and stuff for them.

Nur Adyana Natasha
Student

Q: Would you or would you not involve yourself in the skilled trades and why?

Q: Any advice for people who want to venture into the same field?

Costuming is a broad line. Explore and communicate with your client. It is a skill and service line so one has to be patient. Do research on the material, method of production and cost. Spend time on sketches and communicate with your client. It is crucial to come to an agreement on what can be achieved and what cannot. This is because most of the time we translate the illustrations to an actual outfit. Last but not least, experiment on new ideas.

IN CONCLUSION

As you can see, most of our young people have a rather positive perception of the skilled trades. They all believe that in the end, it takes hard work, passion and perseverance to have a chance at succeeding; and they are not afraid to try. We have also seen from Venus’ story that there is success to be found in the skilled trades and that with much patience and courage, anything can be achieved. In the end though, it all comes down to the individual.

So, are you ready to explore a career in the skilled trade?
HIGH VALUE IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING
MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

By SANDY CLARKE
editor@leaderonomics.com

WHEN Tony Blair became Prime Minister in 1997, one of his key pledges was that every 16-year-old in the country forward was ‘education, education, education’. Blair wanted to create an aspirational Britain, a country in which young people could create successful futures, regardless of their background.

Mentorship was the new buzzword and, to that end, the Labour government aimed to have 100% of all school leavers attending university by 2010. Predictably the policy failed, with the Government in 2010, the chief executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters said Tony Blair’s ‘100%’ promise was ‘simply unachievable’.

In 2009, an OUP/BBC report that could not have come at a more inopportune time revealed the sad statistic that 95% of young people leave school without any employability skill – critical media and media skills, meaning that the policy had driven standards and deviated the asset of change.

We briefly reign in time to the New Labour ‘laboratory’ with an aim of hope, following decades of Contras and Labour. When Margaret Thatcher’sG changed, manufacturing in the UK ascended its decline to 113,000; it accounted for 25.7% of UK gross domestic product. By the time she left in 1990, it had fallen to 15.1% and, by 2020, it was at 9.8%.

When Blair came to office, he told Britain that we were “all middle class, and the dignity of work, the ability to go out and make a bright future for our family ever to attend university.”

 Critics swamped media outlets, in 2010, in his book, an article in the Independent, The Guardian An article in Independent Education Technology, OET, in 2010, added that, although schools identified pupils who would benefit from courses, “the reality was more probably that pupils who would benefit from courses, estimating the first round of state aid to get young people who are more inclined to take up a career in a skilled trade was just as noble than an opportunity to hone the skills they need to go into a skilled trade.”

The International Labour Office (ILO) and International Economic and Education (IEE) developed the Egoortho, a guide that many argue, provides a pathway for students to learn and to create in different fields. Social enterprise is a bit of monon. All applications need to solve a social or individual problem in the end. So every start-up solves some social problem, even if it is a technology or non-tech company.

The amount of talent for creativity is beyond a shadow across the world, and how you do anything anywhere is in the world. This big opportunity is your chance to train yourself. So many more new generations will emerge and many of those who could pursue entrepreneurship.

The path to entrepreneurship is often hard. Failures are common, but that is because young people have the opportunity to fail and learn with little drawbacks.

The path to entrepreneurship is often hard. Failures are common, but that is because young people have the opportunity to fail and learn with little drawbacks. Most entrepreneurs are innovators. They find a new solution for an existing problem and that leads them to entrepreneurship. So, my hypothesis was that if college students are trained to be innovators and exposed to entrepreneurialism at the same time, they would do what they want very easily. My experiments have shown that it has been working very well.

Before the start-up of a company, late in life, with little kids and family responsibility, before you think about anyone should be able to start a small business when they have no such beliefs.

This research at MIM suggests that the ideal time to expose people to entrepreneurship is when they are still students, because at that age, people can afford to fail and learn without breaking the bank. As my research at MIM suggests that the ideal time to expose people to entrepreneurship is when they are still students, because at that age, people can afford to fail and learn without breaking the bank.

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The chief executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters said Tony Blair’s ‘100%’ promise was ‘simply unachievable’.
Facial hair is here to stay, be it due to physical maturity in men, and perhaps wisdom too – think Gandalf, Saruman and Dumbledore. I am sure our very own poet, A. Samad Said, will not look the same without his signature white beard. If you have a baby face and there is a need for you to look older, keep your facial hair. It can add 10 years to your age.

2. **FACIAL HAIR AND AGGRESSION**

    Unless you have Santa Claus’s white bushy beard, it would be difficult to hold a job as a kindergarten teacher if you have thick and dark facial hair.

    Moustache and beard are signs of active testosterone. Men with facial hair are often seen as angry and aggressive. So, if you are in a police force or if you work as a bouncer, then wearing a moustache would definitely make you look more intimidating!

3. **FACIAL HAIR AND CLEANLINESS**

    I once had this guy with really long strands of hair from his mole, packing my buns and bread at a bakery.

    Being me, I couldn’t take my eyes off his hair, worried of what “extra ingredients” might accidentally drop into the bag.

    There is a reason why companies in the hospitality or food industry ban facial hair at their workplaces. It is a perception issue. When you greet your guests, or when you serve at a table, you have to look good. If the person hiring you insists you not to shave, this factor may be worth thinking about.

To conclude, facial hair is here to stay, be it due to religious reasons, style, perception, etc. The long and short of it! To beard or not to beard is very much dependent on:

- You.
- The person looking at you.
- The person hiring you.

If facial hair is something you can’t live without, do keep it trimmed and styled. If the person looking at you is someone gentle, then too much facial hair will work against you. If the person hiring you insists you should be clean shaven, then respect that, or move on.

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**From Boys to Men...**

By WENDY LEE
editor@leaderonomics.com

After 20 years, I have to admit – the only reason I attended Royal Professor Ungku Azizi’s lectures in Universiti Malaya way back then was because I thought he looked cool with his snow-white beard – my Malaysian version of Santa Claus. And I actually paid attention in class!

But my fascination with facial hair never went beyond that. I thought the clean-shaven Hugh Jackman was eye candy in Kate & Leopold. In X-Men, his Wolverine hair and sideburns was still within my acceptable standards.

However, in Sex Mistakes, the scruffy and heavily bearded Jackman was just too much to bear (which probably explains why I didn’t finish the movie).

To shave or not to shave, is a question that plagues many Malaysian men. Some believe that it is more of a liability than an asset, while others attribute their success to having facial hair for good “feng shui”.

**A PERSONAL TAKE**

M. Azizi Yahaya, an executive at a leadership and capability development department, decided to keep his facial hair upon graduating from Universiti Putra Malaysia, as he wanted to look older.

“Facial hair does help me in terms of my confidence level during work interviews. It gives people the perception of a mature, more intelligent person,” claims Azizi.

Among human resources and employers, there is a never-ending debate as to whether facial hair will affect one’s professionalism in the workplace.

Asked if he felt facial hair would be a disadvantage, Azizi says, “I don’t think so. I once shaved off my facial hair and I got awkward looks from my friends.

“I honestly, having to grow it has given me confidence to deal with people.

“In fact, I would say that by having facial hair, I gained an advantage. I can experiment with different styles – the likes of David Beckham or Johnny Depp, just to feel and look different.”

Here’s my personal take on this:

Having facial hair is not something that you can break down into right or wrong. There is a place and time for everything, depending on the end objective you want to achieve.

But first things first, you have to at least make facial hair look good on you!

**THE SHAPE OF YOUR FACE**

Just as girls use bronzers to contour their faces, men can utilise facial hair to make their faces look narrow or broad.

If your face is relatively short and round, go a bit longer at the chin to add length. This will visually make your face look slimmer.

According to Azizi, “Another reason why I kept my facial hair is because I am quite a fat person. Without it, I look really chubby. Facial hair helps me to deviate this focus.”

If you have a long and narrow face, facial hair can act as a focal point to distract viewers and take the attention away from the jawline. A long face requires a beard which is fuller on the sides and shorter on the chin.

With a square face, a goatee is a good option. Just keep your facial hair fuller on the chin and shorter on the sides. This will add length to your overall face.

Let’s look at some of the ‘messages’ that can be interpreted by people looking at your moustache and beard.

1. **FACIAL HAIR AND MATURITY**

    The ability to grow facial hair is a sign of physical maturity in men, and perhaps wisdom too – think Gandalf, Saruman and Dumbledore.

    I am sure our very own poet, A. Samad Said, will not look the same without his signature white beard. Have you a baby face and there is a need for you to look older, keep your facial hair. It can add 10 years to your age.

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**Image Matters**

Mohd Hafiz, a business development executive, says facial hair adds masculinity to his soft, baby-faced look, and he finds it easier to communicate with clients when perceived to be more matured.

Similarly, those struggling with anger management issues are advised to shave off, as the brain will calm down when the mirror image shows a less aggressive self.
By LIM LAY HSUAN
layhsuan.lml@leaderonomics.com

THE high cost of living these days has literally “forced” many of us to resort to the DIY (do-it-yourself) culture, where we build, modify or repair something without professional aid. We make our own pizzas, refurbish our own furniture pieces, sew our own clothes and fix minor plumbing or electrical problems.

Come to think of it, we were all exposed early to some of these basic skills during our schooling years, i.e. through Kemahiran Hidup (literally, “living skills”) subject. I didn’t quite appreciate this subject until much later in life, when I realised that people in the skill-trade industry earn more than white-collar workers. At least that seems to be the case in countries like Australia and Germany.

What about here in Malaysia? I had a “torque” with Hermann Nicholson Xavier, 33, a car mechanic who owns a workshop in Klang to find out more.

STEERING A DESTINY
It has been quite a ride for Hermann, a graduate in mechanical engineering majoring in automotive, since he started repairing cars 15 years ago.

To raise the standards in our automotive industry as a mechanic, he opines, “You need at least some degree of qualification to do this professionally.”

“I personally recommend having at least Level 4 supervisor training certification with institutions such as the National Vocational Training Council, or what is known as Majlis Latihan Vokasional Kebangsaan or MLVK.”

“As for myself, I read up a lot on car and engine manuals. Thanks to the Internet and YouTube, this information is readily downloadable and visually available for us, provided by car enthusiasts who often share their knowledge on these platforms,” continues Hermann.

SPARKS OF SUCCESS AND EMPOWERMENT
Today, Hermann has three workers and one part-timer under him. He stressed that staffing is still a real challenge for him and many others in the industry. The trend is that every so often, workers leave to seek better opportunities.

“It is good in a way, because always advise them to become their own bosses in the future. And not work for someone else too long,” clarifies Hermann, who usually takes in workers from Workers Institute of Technology and Montfort Boys Town.

While they’re with me, I impart in them everything I know so that they can continue to excel in what they do in the near future.”

Along the way, he has also met many generous people who have helped him in many ways, with regard to his business. More importantly, the contented look on his customers and his returning customers keeps him going in this labourious but fulfilling endeavour.

“MANUAL” TRANSMISSION
I conclude the interview by asking Hermann his advice for those who want to venture into the skill-trade industry. He aptly says, “You really need to love what you do. By loving what you do, you will take the effort to learn all about the trade.”

“And by knowing your stuff inside out, you prove yourself a professional and trustworthy mechanic to your customers. Today, my mum is my biggest supporter to me and many others in the industry. The trend is that every so often, workers leave to seek better opportunities.”

As for myself, I read up a lot on car and engine manuals. Thanks to the Internet and YouTube, this information is readily downloadable and visually available for us, provided by car enthusiasts who often share their knowledge on these platforms,” continues Hermann.

“Beyond Just ‘Will’ Alignment

SUSPENDED DREAMS
When it comes to skill-based careers, Malaysians in general still hold the perception that it is only for poor academic achievers. I wondered how the response was from Hermann’s parents when he “got his hands dirty”.

“I experienced the best of two worlds from my parents, in terms of career perspective. On one hand, my late dad was always very supportive of what I do, even supporting me financially at one point to help me set up my workshop.

“On the other hand, my mum wanted me to have a ‘proper’ and ‘respectable’ career – the likes of engineer, doctor and lawyer.

“To fulfill her wishes, I kickstarted my career as an engineer to see where it would lead me next.

“I must say that I gained a great amount of exposure and experience in my four years working as an engineer to help me get to where I am today.”

FUELLING THE PASSION
While working as a full-time engineer, Hermann did not forget his first love for cars. While holding a stable job, he was also a part-time mechanic, repairing cars in the backyard of his house.

Juggling both professions, he realised the hard truth that he was earning more as a mechanic than as an engineer.

“Comparatively, I once even took home RM6,000 just by painting a single-storey house, which was completed within a week. It was way higher than my monthly salary as an engineer.”

The reality accelerated his motivation to venture into business in what he does best, i.e the business of restoring cars.

NAVIGATING ROUGH ROADS
Hermann recalled one unforgettable moment when he was asked to move out from his former workshop because the owner wanted the place back.

“I was desperately looking for a new location that was affordable. I didn’t have enough money then to pay the advanced 3+1 (three months rental and one month deposit) rental because a large portion of what I had previously was invested in the necessary machinery and tools for my business.

“My last few days left to vacate my workshop, with no place still to relocate my tools, I drove around one day and saw a woman closing the doors of a vacant shop lot.

“Armed with prayers and hope, I went down and asked her if the place was available for rent.

“After an exchange of words about my background and what I wanted to do with the space, amazingly, the landlady, Anna Taing, agreed to let me use it first, and pay the rent later! I signed the agreement immediately.”

THE EXTRA MILEAGE
Asked how his workshop stands out among the rest, Hermann says, “A lot of workshops don’t do engine built-up and reengineering.”

“In fact, most mechanics dislike that part of work because it requires you to pay close attention to details and be meticulous, especially when you disassemble an engine and reassemble it again. It can get pretty messy!”

“Like the heart of the car, a mechanic needs to possess a pair of surgeon’s hands to do the “heart” operation in an engine to nurse it back to life from the years of wear and tear.

Inadvertently, it is also a continuous journey of learning and keeping oneself updated with the latest car technology.

“By loving what you do, you will prove yourself a professional and trustworthy mechanic to your customers. Today, my mum is my biggest supporter in what I do!”

With that, customers like you and me can send our cars for repairs with peace of mind, trusting that these mechanics know what they are doing.
By PREMA JAYABALAN
prema.jayabalan@leaderonomics.com

“IT was during my wedding about seven years ago, when I first got a calling to be a make-up artist. I was actively looking for a makeup artist to do my bridal makeover and I could not find anyone who could cater to my simple requirements. There were not many good make-up artists in the northern region, back then,” explains Shantini Prithivi Raj, professional make-up artist and founder of Glitz Bridal Studio, when asked how she ventured into her own start-up.

Shantini is a much sought after make-up artist in the northern region for weddings, receptions and corporate events. She has even spread her wings and is being booked by brides from different parts of the country.

A pretty woman with exquisite taste, it’s hard to believe that Shantini was once a shy girl. “Actually, I have always been interested in arts since young. During our childhood, my twin sister and I used to attend art classes and we had beautiful paintings framed all over our humble home. My ambition was to become a graphic designer, an architect or some sort of an artist since I knew that was where my strength was.”

However, her parents had different plans for her. They wanted her to take after her father’s footsteps and study engineering instead.

AN ENGINEERED PATH

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However, her parents had different plans for her. They wanted her to take after her father’s footsteps and study engineering instead.

This proud mother of two did her diploma in E&E (electrical & electronic) engineering at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and pursued her degree in E&E Engineering at Universiti Tenaga Nasional. She graduated in 2006 and worked as an engineer till 2012.

“I worked as an engineer in various fields, i.e. solar installation and R&D, solar panels manufacturing and LED designing. Being a very hands-on person, I really enjoyed working in the solar field where I was highly involved in installations of solar panels in rural areas, doing research on renewable energies, testing the solar panels in manufacturing lines and maintaining solar equipment for optimum productivity,” reminisces Shantini.

THE TURNING POINT

Though enjoyable, Shantini’s job was equally demanding. She was expected to be on site whenever machines were down and was on call 24/7. This did not help when motherhood came. At that time, she had ventured into her make-up business on a part-time basis.

“The thought of venturing into this field happened during the difficulty I faced when I was about to get married. After the wedding, a little thought crept into my mind asking me to give becoming a make-up artist a shot and I thought… why not?!”

Shantini then took all the relevant courses needed to get her certificate. This was inclusive of a course in make-up, hairstyling and the art of applying henna. She was totally geared up to put her courses to good use.

FACING THE FAMILY

“My mother was shocked when I first told her about my decision, but later gave me her blessings and fully supported my new ambition. Though my parents dreamt of having a successful engineer for a daughter, they both trusted me and stood by my decision and are continuing to do so till today.

Nevertheless, this determined woman did face slight difficulties when it came to assuring some family members and friends who were concerned that she was about to step into a “no-fixed-monthly-salary” lifestyle. Most of her family members were not business owners, hence it was challenging to convince them.

A LEARNING CURVE

Shantini started off as a part-time make-up artist. She was doing this for the first two years as she wanted to establish her business well before venturing into it full-time.

“It was not easy managing engineering, make-up and a very young family; all three needed a lot of attention and it was truly very challenging but somehow I managed to pull through with the help of my family. I left engineering when my make-up business got overwhelming and I could not cope doing both. My daughter was very young at that point and I wanted to be sure to spend enough time with her too,” she recalls.

This charming woman says that her profession has given her countless opportunities to interact with various people, besides being a part of joyous events.

In these six years, she has learned how to enhance her communication skills, build her charisma, how to manage her finances within means and be more confident when dealing with people.

“I realised that it was only when I went full force into make-up that I was able to achieve greater heights in this field, as I was more organised with my work schedule.”

IS IT TOUGH?

Apart from being a make-up artist, Shantini is also a home keeper who tends to the needs of her husband and children. This demands more time and attention as this dynamic woman is a firm believer of family comes first.

When asked what gave her the courage to continue, she simply smiled and said that her passion kept assuring her that this was what she was meant to do. She always tells herself that her bride needs her and she needs them, which was the reason why she ventured into this field in the first place.

“Personally, I believe that we have limited time and that we should not waste it by living someone else’s life. We should follow our heart and intuition, and do what makes us feel happy. At present, there is a growing number of youths pursuing their skills over a professional degree. Most of them are very successful in what they do, though it may be tough in the beginning,” states this courageous entrepreneur.

“Don’t be afraid to give up the good to go for the great! Take a risk – if you win you will be happy, if you lose you will be wise.”

ONE DAY IN THE FUTURE

This energetic business woman aspires to open up her own bridal academy and to take her business into the international arena one day.

“I am very happy with what I have achieved so far and what fulfils me is the bride’s smile when she sees herself in the mirror, and when her parents thank me for making their daughter so beautiful, that is priceless!”
When I arrived at the DIODE Kids camp, I had the impression that something really fun was going on. Young campers were in the midst of learning different kinds of “high-fives.” Laughter and enthusiasm filled the air. As a facilitator, I couldn’t help but smile. As the sessions went on throughout the day, I began to glimpse different personalities among the campers. Some children listened intently to their facilitator; others were occupied with something else, while a few kept shyly within their shells. It was then that the realisation hit me: these campers were going to make DIODE Kids Camp 2015 a very interesting one and a half days!

**ALL ABOARD!**

The DIODE Kids programme is conducted by Leaderonomics for children aged eight to 11. The latest camp was held at Bangunan Bakti Siti Hasmah in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur from June 9-10, 2015.

The theme was “Passport to Build!” Our campers made short “trips” to different countries in the form of activities to learn these four things:

- Building and respecting identity
- Empathy
- Empowerment
- Collaboration.

Activities were created to make learning fun but at the same time, to teach campers responsibility and respect for each other. The idea was that through play, kids would be able to process information, make decisions and interact better with their peers.

The group comprised kids from all walks of life. A few of them were not as strong in English so it did us facilitators proud to see fellow campers consistently reach out even though it was difficult to communicate.

It was also very heartening to see that the campers didn’t separate into cliques and instead mixed together well. Another inspiring thing was to see some campers take initiative by helping each other out during meals or difficult games.

Overall, we saw that the campers had good hearts and great potential to be leaders in different ways.

**Learning through Compromise**

“From my observation, one key learning point that I believe the participants took away from the programme would be the importance of compromise,” says Majura Perahot, a member of the organising committee.

“We saw them having difficulty with compromising especially when everyone wanted to play the games organised throughout the programme. However, as the day passed, I saw that with guidance from our facilitators, they were able to compromise and wait their turns to be heard or to experience the activities planned.”

**Leadership through Empathy**

Campers also learned about empathy. A simple assignment was given at the end of day one, which was to do something nice for someone and show a sense of responsibility.

According to Ameera Hussain, the camp coordinator, “The children were very excited to report on their progress when they had completed their task”, adding that they were very receptive to the lessons taught.

Dear parents, we hope our campers are still demonstrating empathy and responsibility back home!

**In Conclusion**

At the end of it all, we think that it is safe to say our campers enjoyed themselves throughout camp and learned many new and valuable things about themselves, their newfound friends as well as leadership values.

We really do hope that at the end of the day, each and every one of our campers will grow up to be leaders with solid identities and leadership values.

“I really hope that at the end of the day, each and every one of our campers will grow up to be leaders with solid identities and leadership values.”

**JASMINE CHUAH**

By JASMINE CHUAH

time@leaderonomics.com

"The biggest struggle in my group was that the boys were very quiet and seemed to want to lead and take over. The girls were very quiet, even though when asked, they had a lot of opinions. They did not feel comfortable sharing and the boys did not seem to be listening. They eventually overcame it when I encouraged one of the boys to ask the girls their opinion. The girls shared more and the boys listened, slowly and with guidance from me. However, they seemed to work well together, and the boys took a step back and made one of the girls the team leader! "They learned how to respect other people's opinions and listen to each other's ideas."
HAPPY FATHER’S DAY

FROM our homes to yours, Leaderonomics and our readers with all fathers, adoptive fathers, foster fathers, stepfathers, working dads and stay-at-home dads: HAPPY FATHER’S DAY!

If you missed your message in the first instalment, do go to www.leaderonomics.com. The messages keep pouring in!

EVERY GIRL MAY NOT BE A QUEEN TO HER HUSBAND BUT SHE IS ALWAYS A PRINCESS TO HER FATHER. I AM LUCKY TO BE BOTH!

Thank you Appa,

1. For guiding, encouraging, coaching, sitting down with me and literally turning the midnight candle to make sure I did well in primary school. Considering those days when English and Malay language was only taught at the age of nine in Tamil medium primary schools. You wanted to make sure I did well (the common misconception was that Tamil medium students do poorly in studies and never succeed in life)!

2. For sponsoring my very first Europe trip when I turned 21.

3. For being “overprotective” (my sisters will agree to this even now that I am married with a child of my own, because I know you can deeply and you are concerned about my wellbeing and safety.

4. For checking (and sometimes washing and cleaning) my car to make sure I am not stranded in some highway with a car breakdown!

5. For tirelessly sending me to and fro for work and driving me around when I was pregnant so my nausea was over the top and made too sick to drive myself anymore.

6. For emphasising almost all of the time on the importance of staying fit and healthy.

7. For teaching me the art of saving and being financially prudent at a young age.

8. For creating the best electronics projects when I was in secondary school, so it was displayed in front of the class for a month. Oh! How proud I was.

9. Whenever you say “this is not the end of the world” and encourage me to look at issues with different perspectives.

10. For loving your four children equally and for being a fantastic Appa, husband and not to forget Grandpa to Dishvarthan.

Love you Appa.

From Rohini Ramanathan @ Mohantibak

EVENTS

HURRY, SIGN UP NOW!

Invest your time wisely this coming school holidays and sign up for DIOCE Camps! The camps aim to help youth discover and grow their leadership potential by providing an alternative method to learning through hands-on experiences in project management, communication skills, confidence building, public speaking, self-discovery, teamwork, decision making and much more in a fun and safe environment!

For children between the ages of eight and 13 who would like to explore your leadership potential, join us in our two-day leadership discovery programme!

Find out more on www.diosccamps.com

MALAYSIA HR AWARDS 2015

The prestigious 15th Malaysia HR Awards 2015 organised by the Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management will be presented to winners on Oct 29. To date, an overwhelming number of submissions have been received. This year, the Malaysia HR AWARDS 2015 will be presented in eight categories. Submission for interested organisations and individuals is still open till June 30.

Also next week

The power of social media

Facebook to help your career?

Lessons from Kingdom Hearts

Leadership recipe tips

This Career Guide Powered by Leaderonomics The Science of Building Leaders

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For advertising and editorial, contact Praveen Kumar at praveen.kumar@leaderonomics.com or +603 2377 8800.